



PRABUDDHA BHARATA

Monthly Journal of Ramakrishna Order
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MAY 2005

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Prabuddha Bharata

Advaita Ashrama

P.O. Mayavati, Via. Lohaghat

Dt. Champawat—262 524

Uttaranchal

E-mail: awakened@rediffmail.com

Publication Office:

Advaita Ashrama

5 Dehi Entally Road,

Kolkata 700 014

Ph: 91•33•22440898 / 22452383 / 22164000

Fax: 22450050

E-mail: advaita@vsnl.com

Cover: The Renovated Swami Vivekananda's Ancestral House and Cultural Centre; inset: Swamiji's Birthplace

उत्तिष्ठत
जाग्रत
प्राप्य
वरान्निबोधत ।

PRABUDDHA BHARATA

Arise! Awake! And stop not till the goal is reached!

Vol. 110

MAY 2005

No. 5

Traditional Wisdom

VINAYA: HUMILITY

अहङ्कारं बलं दर्पं कामं क्रोधं परिग्रहम् ।
विमुच्य निर्ममः शान्तो ब्रह्मभूयाय कल्पते ॥

Forsaking conceit, force, pride, lust, wrath and (superfluous) possessions; egoless and tranquil at heart, one becomes worthy of becoming one with Brahman.
(Bhagavadgita, 18.53)

जितेन्द्रियत्वं विनयस्य कारणं गुणप्रकर्षो विनयादवाप्यते ।
गुणाधिके पुंसि जनोऽनुरज्यते जनानुरागप्रभवा हि सम्पदः ॥

Mastery over the senses is the source of humility; from humility flow all noble qualities. True nobility wins human hearts; and people's love is the fount of felicity.
(Bhāravi)

कबीरा गर्ब न कीजिये ऊंचा देखि आबास ।
काल परौ भुँड़ लेटना ऊपर जमसी घास ॥

Be not proud, says Kabir, of your mansion high and tall; death will lay you down to ground and grass'll grow o'er all. (Kabir)

There are two signs of knowledge: first, absence of pride, and second, a peaceful nature. (Sri Ramakrishna)

Humility is a great aid to self-improvement. The Master used to say, 'Water accumulates in a low place, whereas it flows down from a high mound.' All virtues come to a humble person. (Swami Turiyananda)

More fearing are the wise in a state of spiritual expansion (*bast*) than they are in contraction (*qabd*), for few are those in a state of expansion who stay within the confines of spiritual propriety (*adab*). (Ibn 'Atā'illah)

❖ This Month ❖

This month's editorial, **Contemplative Dialogue**, introduces three articles on inter-religious dialogue with a brief survey of Christian and Hindu attitudes to dialogue in the context of religious pluralism, and the need for a contemplative dialogic mode.

Prabuddha Bharata—100 Years Ago contains excerpts from a pamphlet on 'Manual Training' that was written by Sister Nivedita and published by Mr S S Setlur, Advocate, Bombay High Court. It provides remarkable insights into the utility of manual training.

In his **Benedictory Address** at the concluding celebrations of Holy Mother Sri Sarada Devi's 150th birth anniversary, Sri-mat Swami Ranganathanandaji Maharaj, President, Ramakrishna Math and Ramakrishna Mission, calls for the elimination of caste distinctions and social privilege in the light of Sri Sarada Devi's teachings.

Swami Atulanandaji's **Reflections on the Bhagavadgita** takes up the first five verses of Chapter Twelve of the Gita, wherein the distinction between the worshippers of a Personal God and the formless Brahman is enunciated.

In his essay, **Role of Meditation in Hindu-Christian Dialogue**, Prof. Arvind Sharma, Birks Professor of Comparative Religion, McGill University, Montreal, suggests that meditative practices and related sadhanas can provide an effective locus for inter-religious communication.

Fr Francis X Clooney, SJ, Boston College, Boston, provides a delightful comparison of the Srivaishnava concept of *prapatti* and the

Jesuit idea of surrender to God, in his article **Inter-religious Dialogue, Contemplative Paths and the Vision of God**.

Meditation according to Hinduism, by Swami Nityasthanandaji, former Editor, *Viveka Prabha*, is a brief but insightful summary of the steps and stages of dhyana.

In the first instalment of **The Concept of God in the Vedas**, Swami Tattwamayanandaji, Editor, *Prabuddha Keralam*, examines the Vedic conception of popular gods in all its richness of unity in variety.

Life and Teachings of Buddha: Some Gleanings is a perceptive narrative on the occasion of Buddha Purnima, which falls on 23 May. Its author, Dr Satish K Kapoor, is Director, Centre of Historical Studies, Lyallpur Khalsa College, Jalandhar.

Vitasta—The Sacred River of Kashmir traces the course of the River Jhelum through Kashmir, highlighting its rich historical, social, and religious associations. Sri Chander M Bhat, the author, is an officer in the Postal Department at Jammu.

The concluding (tenth) instalment of **Parabrahma Upaniṣad**, translated by Swami Atmapriyanandaji, Principal, Ramakrishna Mission Vidyamandira, Belur, highlights the internal sacred thread of Knowledge as the true insignia of a brahmana that makes one eligible for sannyasa.

Swami Kalyandev: A Lamp that Swamiji Lighted recounts the inspiring life story of Baba Kalyandev, a centenarian sadhu who dedicated his life to the service of the masses at the behest of Swami Vivekananda.

Contemplative Dialogue

EDITORIAL

At the north-east corner of the crossing of Chittaranjan Avenue and Mahatma Gandhi Road in Kolkata stands an old mosque, the Kasim Ismail Madan Wakf Masjid, popularly called the Geratala Masjid. One evening, over a hundred and twenty years ago, Manmathanath Ghosh, a petty employee of Messrs Rally Brothers & Co., was passing by the mosque on his way back from work. He had to walk a long distance and the day's hard work had tired him out. But the scene that met his weary eyes at the mosque left him transfixed: A mussalman fakir, standing in front of the mosque, was calling out in a touching voice with tears streaming profusely from his eyes, 'Come, my Beloved, come!' Manmatha stood there watching his divine fervour when a hackney carriage came rattling down and pulled up beside the fakir. Sri Ramakrishna alighted from the carriage and rushed to the fakir. Before Manmatha could make out what was happening, Sri Ramakrishna and the fakir were locked in tight embrace, their faces beaming with heavenly joy.¹

This episode provides an apt imagery for the three essays on inter-religious dialogue that appear in this issue of *Prabuddha Bharata*. Prof. Arvind Sharma's paper initiated this dialogue and the responses from Father Clooney and Swami Nityasthananda highlight some aspects of religious practice and experience that cut across denominational barriers. In this context it may be worthwhile reviewing the status of inter-religious dialogue with special reference to Hindus and Christians.

The Nature of Dialogue

The term 'dialogue' invariably evokes the Socratic connection. The dialogues of Plato are discursive in nature and pedagogical in

function. In the inter-religious context, however, the focus needs to be elsewhere if dialogue is to be fruitful. Inter-religious dialogue presupposes an 'encounter', but the latter does not necessarily lead to the former. This is because, in the interfaith context, an element of conflict is taken for granted, as pointed out by Prof. Sharma. This, according to the Jewish religious philosopher Martin Buber, creates an 'I-It' relationship that treats the 'other' only as an object of thought, or as a convenience that can be manipulated. In contrast, a genuinely mature relationship is of the 'I-Thou' variety, into which both parties enter in the fullness of their being. In the words of R L Howe, this involves 'a reciprocal relationship in which every party "experiences the other side" so that their communication becomes a true address and response in which each informs and learns.'² The actual process of a genuine dialogue may then be categorized as *vāda* in the traditional Hindu context; for *vāda*, in contradistinction to *jalpa* (polemic) and *vitandā* (cavil), refers to an open-minded discussion amongst seekers of truth (*tattvabubhutsavah*).

The Christian Contribution

A significant proportion of the literature on inter-religious dialogue is from Christian sources. This is understandable given the extensiveness of its following—temporally, numerically as well as geographically—the elaborateness of its organizational structure, and its unbroken tradition of theological formulations and responses to pragmatic issues and temporal debates.

The Secretariat for Non-Christians at the Vatican, in its document 'Dialogue and Mission' published in 1984, identifies the follow-

ing types of dialogue: 1) the dialogue of life, open and accessible to all; 2) the dialogue of a common commitment to the works of justice and human liberation; 3) the intellectual dialogue in which scholars engage in an exchange at the level of their respective religious legacies, with the goal of promoting communion and fellowship; and 4) on the most profound level, the sharing of the religious experiences of prayer and contemplation in a common search for the Absolute.³

The ‘dialogue of life’ is well illustrated by the example of the Kerala Christians prior to the arrival of the Portuguese missionaries. Having arrived in Kerala in the fourth century CE, if not earlier, the St Thomas Christians were accorded a generous reception that helped them get socially integrated while maintaining their distinct faith. They married and converted several high-caste Hindus, and found a place for themselves in the upper ranks of society. This process of inculcation was helped by a non-exclusivist thinking (they believed that everyone can be saved in his or her own religion—a belief that was condemned as heretic in 1599 by the Synod of Diamper when Archbishop Menzias compelled the Syrian Christians to make public profession and written adherence to the Catholic faith), a respect for the religious figures and the cultus of the Hindus (the latter was, in fact, shared and appropriated), and their refusal to disturb the social structure of their new homeland through active proselytization.

The ‘dialogue of common commitment’ is essentially a social approach that was persuasively advanced within the Catholic Church by the South American Liberation Theologians in the 1960s and 70s. It stressed both heightened awareness of the socio-economic structures that caused social inequities and active participation in changing those structures. Its founding father, Gustavo Gutiérrez, insisted on the priority of liberative praxis over theological discourse. As this approach involves participation in issues of gen-

eral humanitarian concern, it provides an existential platform for dialogue and, when divested of exclusivist theological trappings, the possibility of a vocabulary that can be shared with other religious groups.

The intellectual-theological approach has been the traditional method of interfaith dialogue, and it also happens to be the most contentious. The traditional Christian position had been defined by the exclusivist doctrine *‘extra ecclesium nulla salus’*; outside the church no salvation’, traditionally associated with the name of St Cyprian and officially reiterated by the Council of Florence in 1442 CE. The Church as the mystical body of Christ had its precedent in the Buddhist placement of the Sangha at par with Buddha and Dharma, and has its counterpart in Swami Vivekananda’s identification of the Ramakrishna Sangha with the body of Sri Ramakrishna. But when this concept got equated with the administrative structure of the Church, spiritual concerns got undermined by the temporal.

This attitude was carried down right up to the early decades of the last century when the robust realities of other religions encountered in the Mission fields led to a rethinking and evolution of an inclusivist Christian theology. This involved a shift of focus from the Church to the person of Christ, from ecclesiocentrism to Christocentrism. This position took two forms: 1) the ‘fulfilment theory’ that regards Christianity as the fulfilment of other religions by virtue of the unique revelation in Christ, and 2) the ‘presence of the mystery of Christ in other religions’ view that considers the good seen in non-Christian traditions as marks of the presence of an unknown Christ, and non-Christians leading genuinely holy lives as ‘anonymous Christians’, to use a Karl Rahner phrase.

This inclusivist position can hardly be termed realistic in a manifestly plural world, and contemporary Christian scholars (like John Hick and Paul Knitter) have tried to evolve fresh approaches to address this prob-

lem. This calls for a shift of axis from Christ to God, a theocentric perspective 'that substitutes many "ways" or saving figures leading to God-the-Centre, in place of the one, universal, constitutive mediation of Jesus Christ'. This viewpoint is presently considered too radical to be officially acceptable to the Catholic Church.

Two other Christian theological perspectives that have been evoked in the context of dialogue are logocentrism and pneumocentrism. The former refers to Logos, the divine reason, the 'true Light that enlightens every human being',⁴ and the latter to the Spirit that knows no bounds of time and space, that, free of all constraints, 'blows where it wills'.⁵ These are clearly universal categories that account for the universality of the religious impulse and intuition, but, in the discourse of Christian apologists, they get inseparably identified with the person of Christ. Consequently, both logo- and pneumocentric models are reduced to Christocentrism, thus falling short of a genuine theology of religious pluralism.

Although there has been a broadening of the Christian understanding of other religions in recent times (the post-Vatican II period), and even the Catholic Church has officially avowed its commitment to dialogue, concomitant theological moorings rob such avowals of much of their efficacy. For instance, the Vatican document 'Dialogue and Proclamation' explicitly identifies the proclamation of the Christian gospel as the aim of dialogue; dialogue, in other words, is evangelization. To more liberal dialogists such a stance is eminently anti-dialogue.

The Hindu Response

The popular Hindu view is that, God being one, all religions are, in essence, the same. Religious differences are therefore unimportant, and although religion itself is of paramount importance, it does not really matter what religion one professes. This view has

been termed 'indifferentism' by religious scholars because it is not based on a genuine knowledge of religions other than one's own. This attitude, though engendering tolerance, does not help promote dialogue.

A more nuanced Hindu approach sees spiritual and theological elements of universal value, that are accorded prime importance in the Hindu world view, as important constituents of other religions too.⁶ It therefore considers other religions as expressions of one eternal religion, *sanātana dharma*, and this helps it to identify with those religions and even integrate many of their elements into itself. This stance, however, is not acceptable to conservative Christians, for they see in it a surreptitious antidote to their own exclusivist stand. In fact, most Christian dialogists are wary of anything that is suggestive of syncretism.

A more formal pronouncement of the inclusivist Hindu doctrine is found in the Bhagavadgita, where Sri Krishna announces that all men are following His path alone.⁷

The experiential insights of Sri Ramakrishna not only articulate the pluralist Hindu viewpoint but also highlight elements indispensable to a genuine theology of religious pluralism. Following his spiritual encounter with various religions Sri Ramakrishna came to the conclusion that 1) the ultimate Reality is one; it manifests itself in different forms in various religions, which in turn address it by different names; 2) each of these religions is a valid means to the realization of this ultimate Reality; 3) God realization being the primary purpose of human life, the validity of all religions lies primarily in their ability to subserve this purpose; and 4) in interacting with other religions one must look forward to assimilating their best elements while remaining steadfast in one's faith (*iṣṭa niṣṭhā*).

Two practical corollaries of the above principles were pointed out by Swami Vivekananda: 1) Religions of the world are mutually supplementary and not contradictory. 2) A change of one's religion or proselytization can

hardly be justified on spiritual grounds.

The Spiritual-Contemplative Approach

The Ramakrishna-Vivekananda Vedanta tradition has consistently pointed to the spiritual dimension as the core of religion, and it is on this core that dialogue must be based for it to be genuinely deep. Sri Ramakrishna points out that in the non-dual nirvikalpa plane ‘all jackals howl alike’, thereby meaning that all those with the Advaitic experience of the God-head describe it in similar terms. While this unitary experience does not hold in the dualistic plane of our daily experiences—and the diversity in religious revelation is a testimony to this fact—yet it is genuine spiritual experience alone that makes one perceptive to the category of the ‘spiritual’. Swami Vivekananda points out that ‘mystics in every religion speak the same tongue’ and William Hocking has observed that ‘the true mystic will recognize the true mystic across all boundaries and will learn from him’.

William James has identified ineffability, noetic quality, transiency, and passivity as the four marks of genuine mystical experience. Of these, ineffability and passivity are especially pertinent to interfaith dialogue. Robert Baird has noted that ‘not only does dialogue take place at a level other than theology, but it is an experience of truth in distinction from the truth of propositions. And since it is an experience of truth in distinction from the truth of propositions, it is an experience that breaks the “barrier of words”, for it speaks of “the possibility of a communion and exchange of experience that go beyond and behind the words.”’⁸

Raimundo Panikkar identifies another feature of dialogue that is analogous to the mystic’s experience of passivity:

I would like to stress here a not-so-insignificant result of the Hindu-Christian dialogue. In spite of misunderstandings, difficulties, and drawbacks, it has an unavoidable effect: It changes not only our opinion of the religion we study |

and dialogue with; it also changes our stand and interpretation of our own religion. It undermines, as it were, the very basis on which one stood when beginning the dialogue. The dialogue, even if imperfectly undertaken, backfires. We may not convince the partners; we may get irritated at others; they may be impervious to our opinions. Nevertheless, we ourselves imperceptibly change our stance. The inter-religious dialogue triggers the intra-religious dialogue in our minds and hearts. (xiv)

Murray Rogers, the Christian evangelist who had occasion to live and deeply interact with Thakkar Bapa and other Gandhians, noted that the spiritual phenomena that these people shared with him could not be approached and understood with the equipment with which he had arrived in India: ‘If I were to understand more deeply the heart of this experience I began to sense in our Hindu friends, I had to free myself from my own mental and spiritual conditionings; I had to resist judging from *my* theological or philosophical positions. Rather, it was a matter of throwing myself into the stream, entrusting myself to it, allowing it to do what it would with me.’ (200)

This *epoché*, suspension of judgement, is indispensable to any successful interfaith dialogue just as it (along with *Einfühlung*, or empathy) is a prime prerequisite for any phenomenological study. But to conservative eyes this amounts to a dangerous ‘bracketing of faith’ that can prove disastrous to the integrity of one’s personal faith. Murray Rogers writes of his own experience:

There were some sincere Christian people who saw great danger in this; we might easily lose our Christian faith and bearings and become, if not outwardly then inwardly, Hindu. We ourselves knew what it meant to tremble before such a venture of the spirit, but we believed then, as we do now, that if the Lord were not able to hold us himself and in himself, no matter how deeply we plunge into this “other” spiritual way, then it would be clear that he is not the Lord we believe him to be. (200)

Sri Ramakrishna once likened the supreme Satchidananda to an ocean of nectar in which one could safely plunge without fear of drowning, for this was the ocean of immortality. But he also pointed to the need of protecting and nurturing one's faith in the early stages of spiritual life (just as a sapling needs to be fenced till it grows into a tree). One must, therefore, needs be secure in one's faith before one can hope to engage in meaningful dialogue. This security is an essential concomitant of valid faith, for faith as distinct from belief is 'not an opinion, nor any number of opinions put together, be they ever so true. It is the vision of the soul, that power by which spiritual things are apprehended, just as material things are apprehended by the physical senses.'⁹ This dynamic faith is what is termed shraddha, and has been likened to 'a mother, always protecting the spiritual aspirant'.¹⁰

It is this shraddha that powers contemplative life and is, in turn, strengthened by it. Not only do meditation and contemplation (dhyana) engage the deepest dimensions of one's being, they also involve internal transformations that are singularly conducive to dialogue. Beatrice Bruteau's observations in her book *Radical Optimism* (a review of which appears in this issue) are singularly apt:

Contemplation is not just an intellectual activity. It is also a moral and a devotional matter. Unless we have freed ourselves of violence, anger, vengefulness and vindictiveness, we will not be able to retire within. Unless we have detached from lust, greed, envy and covetousness, we will not be able to refocus on the transcendent level. Unless we are energized by yearning for the divine as the Real and are willing to be embedded in it rather than making use of it, we will never find it.

People who are long-term practitioners of contemplation characteristically drop one local self-identification after another. They no longer see their personal reality limited to membership in this group rather than that. ... They experience themselves as being more real at a level that transcends all these classifications, and they simultaneously see other people at the

same level of commonality. This view invariably makes for peaceful and supportive relationships.¹¹

By exposing our unconscious assumptions, and by making us more perceptive as well as receptive, meditation and contemplation pave the path for dialogue. But dhyana is a skill, as much as is dialogue, and it calls for practice. It is in seeking the Divine in the depths of our hearts, and in perceiving the inflow of grace therein, that we become authentically spiritual. It is this authenticity that is a precondition for dialogue. ~

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1. Kumud Bandhu Sen, 'Two Episodes' in *Prabuddha Bharata*, September 1955, 361.
2. *Hindu-Christian Dialogue*, ed. Harold Coward (Delhi: Motilal BanarsiDass, 1993), 13.
3. Cited in Jacques Dupuis, SJ, *Toward a Christian Theology of Religious Pluralism* (Anand: Gujarat Sahitya Prakash, 2001), 363-4.
4. St John, 1.9.
5. Ibid., 3.8.
6. An instance of this is the Advaita concept of *sat-chit-ananda*, Being-Consciousness-Bliss and the Christian concept of the Trinity: Father, Son and Spirit (Holy Ghost). Christian theologians agree that the triads developed by St Augustine—of *mens, notitia, amor* and *memoria, intelligentia, voluntas*, the three members of which correspond respectively to the Father as being, Son as consciousness, and the Spirit as love—provide one of the deepest theological and psychological insights into the 'divine mystery' of the Trinity.
7. Bhagavadgita, 4.11.
8. *Hindu-Christian Dialogue*, 225.
9. Wesley, cited in S Radhakrishnan, *The Hindu View of Life* (New Delhi: HarperCollins, 1998), 5.
10. Vyasa's commentary on Patanjali's *Yoga Sutras*, 1.20.
11. Beatrice Bruteau, *Radical Optimism* (New York: Sentient Publications, 1996), 4.

Prabuddha Bharata—100 Years Ago

May 1905

Manual Training as a Part of General Education in India

The plea for manual training is thus put by Professor William James of Harvard: 'The most colossal improvement which recent years have seen in secondary education lies in the introduction of the manual training schools; not because they will give us a people more handy and practical for domestic life and better skilled in trades, but because they will give us citizens with an entirely different intellectual fibre. Laboratory work and shop work engender a habit of observation, a knowledge of the difference between accuracy and vagueness and an insight into nature's complexity and into the inadequacy of all verbal accounts of real phenomena, which once wrought into the mind, remain there as lifelong possessions. They confer precision ... they give honesty ... they beget a habit of self-reliance. ... They occupy the pupil in a way most congruous with the spontaneous interests of his age. They absorb him, and leave impressions durable and profound. Compared with the youth taught by these methods, one brought up exclusively on books carries through life a certain remoteness from reality; he stands, as it were, out of the pale, and feels that he stands so; and often suffers a kind of melancholy from which he might have been rescued by a more real education.'

If America, with her workshops and dockyards, her manufacture of machinery and her scientific laboratories, cannot afford to ignore the Mechanic Age in her schoolrooms, how much less can India, for whom the immediate (though not final) problem is for her own entrance into that age?

It is best to begin where we can. A union of two or three farsighted Indian merchants, anxious for the future of industry in this country, would be sufficient to establish manual training high schools, and technical schools of the College Grade, in the capitals of the different presidencies. And Indian Sovereigns might do likewise, each in his own state. But the impossibility of furnishing their schools with princely completeness ought not to deter the rank and file of headmasters from considering simple means of giving useful manual training to their boys.

A man who is to take a high position in the world of industry ought to pass from the manual training school to the university, and after completing his general education there, return to the technical institute, and spend two years in special technical preparation.

... Say the experts of St Louis: 'In manual education the chief object is mental development and culture. ... The primary object is the acquirement of mental clearness and intellectual acumen.'

The University of St Louis goes on to point out that, ideally, manual training ought to have a general, rather than a specific character, if its possible economic application is to have the widest range. 'We therefore abstract all the mechanical processes, and manual arts, and typical tools, of the trades and occupations of men, and arrange a systematic course of instruction in the same. Thus, without teaching any trade, we teach the essential mechanical principles which underlie all mechanical trades.' A very significant insight into the nature of the work done in the schoolroom is here afforded. There is a marked difference between the practice of a trade as such, and its use for educational purposes. If the two were the same, the object of manual training might be served by putting a boy into an artisan's workshop for a certain number of hours every week. But they are not the same. To learn to make furniture is not the same thing, by any means, as to acquire accuracy, facility, and executive ability, by working at the cutting and fitting of wood.

—Sister Nivedita

Benedictory Address

SWAMI RANGANATHANANDA

Delivered on 4 January 2005 at the concluding celebrations of Holy Mother Sri Sarada Devi's 150th birth anniversary held at Belur Math.

Friends and Devotees,

We are observing today Holy Mother's 150th birth anniversary. Different speakers—today, tomorrow and the day after—will discuss various aspects of Holy Mother's life and message. I am glad to speak to you today a few words about Holy Mother's life and what message we get from that life.

One thing you can mark—our country is now free; we have got a democracy; democracy means that the common people are equal to all high-class people, not separate. And so in this age, we need a new attitude towards each other. We are citizens of a free democracy—everyone; no distinction of caste or creed. And in Holy Mother's life you will find this wonderful development; one who could take in American Christians, British Christians; live together, eat together. Mother, although coming from a very orthodox *kulin* brahmin family, could overcome all this and create a democratic attitude. Miss Margaret Noble (Sister Nivedita) of England, Christine Greenstidel, Mrs Sara Bull and Josephine MacLeod of America—all were received by Holy Mother. They also ate together. She also looked after a Muslim boy, Amjad, very well. After feeding him she cleaned the *ucchishta* (leavings) herself. What a wonderful thing! Coming from a *kulin* brahmin family and without any (formal) education, she cultivated this liberal attitude. Holy Mother's life contains these various incidents—all of which have great meaning for India.

Our country has one peculiar disease, what we call discrimination between upper caste and lower caste—untouchability (*aspir-*

shyata). All this has been ruining India. Now the time has come to make all people one and the same. Ultimately this equality must come. Holy Mother, Swamiji and Sri Ramakrishna have showed this in their lives: this type of harmony between man and man, man and woman; no kind of upper caste or lower caste. Democracy also emphasizes this point—only one vote for everyone. No one is superior or inferior. Democracy means [of and for the] common people—all are common people, so far as democracy is concerned.

Today we have this celebration. Beginning with the 150th birthday of Holy Mother, by the next century, we must be able to achieve complete democracy in India. Holy Mother, Swamiji and Sri Ramakrishna have given us the message to treat human beings as equals. No upper or lower, no caste or creed. Casteism and untouchability must be completely removed from India. And we can see that happening slowly in our own lives.

The Gita tells you—God incarnates whenever there is decline of dharma to create new dharma, *kaladharma*; '*sambhavāmi yuge yuge*.' This time Sri Ramakrishna has come, along with Swami Vivekananda and Holy Mother Sri Sarada Devi, and there is a manifestation of real human development in India. If these teachings are applied all over India, it is my hope that this century will see the beginning of tremendous activity to remove the great blot of untouchability and casteism from India. Swamiji lived in England and America, and we are told that all the foreign people are *mlecchas*. Swamiji says in one place that India's doom was sealed the very day it started be-

lieving in the word *mleccha* and stopped communicating with the world outside. The *mleccha*-idea should be killed now—no more of *mleccha*. Indeed, thousands of our people are studying in America and England.

Holy Mother's life is a great example. She is a divine personality, with absolutely no (conventional) education. Yet she had shown how to deal with all these (foreign) people. One important thing is Holy Mother's photo. Who arranged to take these photos? Mrs Sara Bull. She requested Mother to allow a photo. Mother did not allow in the beginning. After much persuasion, when she (Mrs Bull) said, 'I want to take the photo to America and worship it', Mother slowly agreed. In all the different photos that you get, taken by Mrs Sara Bull, you can see Holy Mother sitting. In one photo you can see Holy Mother sitting on one side and Sister Nivedita sitting on the other. It is a beautiful photo. We are all enjoying this photo of Holy Mother—it is seen everywhere. This photo signifies this unity (of the East and the West). Our democracy must thus be strengthened. India is very bad in this matter. For more than two thousand years we have been practising this kind of untouchability, casteism, and all that.

Mother's life is a great example for us—for all our people, all over India. The Gita says, whatever a great man does, all others follow that. The brahmins and also the highly educated people in India—if they change and try to stop untouchability, all other people will then follow. There is the teaching in the Gita:

*Yadyadācarati śresthas
tattadevetaro janah;
Sa yatpramāṇam kurute
lokastadanuvartate.*

Whatever the top people do, that will be followed by lesser people also.

Our democracy today will be real only when we have this equality. Already it has come in the political language. Everybody has

one vote, even the untouchable; even the tribal has only one vote. So also the top people in India—brahmanas and kshatriyas—have but one vote. The servant has one vote, the master also has only one vote, not two. Democracy has already made for this equality of humanity in India. So you will see great consequences in the future, the strength of this new democracy—of everybody having one vote.

Holy Mother's message will spread. The life and message of Sri Ramakrishna, Sri Sarada Devi and Swami Vivekananda will continue to inspire India in the coming generations. In this manner we shall establish harmony and peace in India and respect for every human being. Our teachers tell us in the Upanishads, Gita and Bhagavata that God is present in the hearts of all beings. Krishna says in the Gita: '*Ahamātmā guḍākeśa sarvabhūtāśayasthitah;* Arjuna, I am in the hearts of all beings.' (10.20) If God is in the hearts of all beings what distinction can there be? We alone make social distinctions, artificial distinctions—these shall go. The distinctions based upon the highest titles of a person must come; and we are identified with God who is in the hearts of all beings. So, I am sure, these teachings of Vedanta exemplified in the lives of Sri Ramakrishna, Swamiji and Mother will inspire people all over India and also abroad. I am sure this will happen. Today I am very happy to be at this beautiful meeting, where people have come from all over India. I thank you all for this function. I am happy to take part in it and I am sure we shall get great inspiration during the next few days. When you go back home, you should carry this inspiration. Stop untouchability. Democracy will thus be strengthened and Vedantic India will come thereby. Swami Vivekananda wanted that. Vedanta says: We are all one; 'I am the Atman'—(this applies to) every being.

Thank you all. Namaskar.

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Reflections on the Bhagavadgita

SWAMI ATULANANDA

Chapter 12: The Path of Bhakti Yoga

We have now come to the last chapter of the middle section of the Gita, the section devoted more especially to bhakti. And this last chapter, the twelfth, is called the chapter on Bhakti Yoga, or 'The Path of Devotion'. It is short, but is very much liked by the devotees. It is very pleasing to them. Especially beautiful is the end of this chapter, when the Lord gives a description of the true bhakta, who is so dear to Him. How ignorant are the people who criticize Vedanta and the Hindu religion in general as being devoid of morals! What higher ethics can we find in any scriptures? What higher code of morality can we conceive of than that given in the last part of the twelfth chapter? Not to hate any being, to be kind to all, to be free from selfishness and egotism, unmoved by praise and censure, contented and steady-minded, following God's commands and be entirely devoted to Him—the man who embodies these qualities is a holy man indeed. And such a man, the Lord says, is dear to Him. He is a true bhakta.

Vedanta teaches the highest devotion to God. Bhakti is more than a little sentimental. It is the path of systematized devotion for the attainment of union with the Absolute. It is the easiest and the surest path to realization. Through prayer and love and devotion the bhakta reaches the superconscious state, the state of samadhi. Bhakti in its highest stages melts into jnana. Both the bhakta and the jnani are lovers of Truth, of that Truth which is God. Love cannot come without knowledge. And knowledge of God cannot be without love. There are little souls who worship God for reward, or to escape punishment, or who, when in distress, go to Him for consolation. But

these are in the lower stages of bhakti. This is the very beginning of bhakti. It is not to be condemned, but we must understand that these devotions gradually will make room for a more unselfish love, love free from selfish motive, devoid of all idea of gain. Prayer is very necessary for the bhakta. He prays to the Lord, who is our Father and Mother, that He may cut our bonds. 'Take me by the hand as a father takes his son, and leave me not. Be Thou my shelter, my refuge. Let me always dwell with Thee. Let me never be separated from Thee'—such is the prayer of the bhakta.

But we cannot all be of the highest type. And the Lord speaks words of encouragement and advice to all, to everyone, in whatever stage of bhakti he may be. And in this chapter the Lord points out the different methods to select from. If one way does not suit, then try another, or still another. It does not matter. All are dear to Me, but all do not want Me. Those who want Me are very dear to Me, and they are very close to Me. They partake of My very nature. They are the Spirit of My Spirit and parts of My Being. And they realize it. In samadhi they taste that blissful union.

The true bhakta knows no fear. He worships because he loves to worship. He is not driven by fear. When he worships, he knows what he is doing. It is not blind worship. Love and knowledge are consolidated in his devotions. And therefore he stands on firm ground. First let me know the Truth and then, if I wish, I shall worship. Not in obedience to others, not in imitation, but because I am firmly convinced that bhakti is true happiness. The bhakta as well as the jnani is devoted to Truth. They both love Truth and they both become

united with Truth. Such a bhakta stands immovable like the Himalayas. He cannot be swayed by every breeze that blows about him. His bhakti is his life. He cannot give it up. It has become part of himself. Even unconsciously he worships. He does not require any external forms or rites. Love is in his heart. There the Lord dwells constantly, and he never forgets it. He always remembers his beloved Lord.

The chapter opens with a question. We

will remember that Sri Krishna has taught two kinds of worship, the worship of the Absolute and the worship of the Ruler of the universe. In the eleventh chapter again Sri Krishna had shown Arjuna His Universal Form, manifesting itself as the whole universe. And having shown that form, the Lord had exhorted Arjuna to do works for His sake alone. Therefore Arjuna, wanting to know which of these ways of worship was the better one, asks the following question:

1. Arjuna said:

Those devotees who, ever devoted to Thee, thus worship Thee, and those who worship the Unmanifest Imperishable—which of them are better versed in yoga?

Which form of worship is superior, the worship of the Personal God, the worship of Ishvara as He has just been seen by Arjuna in His Universal Form, or the worship of the Formless? To which aspect of the Reality should we direct our worship, to the saguna or the nirguna, to Brahman with form or without form? The one is endowed with the highest qualities; the other has no qualities. The one is reached by the path of bhakti, the positive path; the other is reached by jnana, the path of negation. Shall we worship a God to whom we can reach up, whom we can love as we love a father or a mother or a

friend, in whose presence we rejoice, whom we can serve as a Master, or shall we follow the path of denial, the '*neti, neti*' path, the path of negation? That is Arjuna's question. Should we worship God as pointed out in the last verse of the eleventh chapter, or should we, abandoning all desires and renouncing all actions, meditate on the Absolute Unmanifest, the One incomprehensible to the senses and devoid of all *upadhis*?

In answering the question, Sri Krishna first deals with the worshippers of Ishvara, the personal aspect of God.

2. The Blessed Lord said:

Those who, fixing their minds on Me, worship Me with perpetual devotion, endowed with supreme faith, they, in My opinion, are the best versed in yoga.

Among the different bhaktas (as distinct from the jnanis), those bhaktas are the greatest yogis, who pass their days and nights in constant thought of Me, the omni-

scient Ruler of the universe, Ishvara, the supreme Lord, the Guru of all gurus. But they must worship Me in My highest Universal Form. And they must be endowed with su-

preme faith. Shraddha, faith, is very necessary. Otherwise our devotion becomes of a mechanical nature; it becomes lip devotion, a parrot-like repetition of words and phrases and ideas,

Shraddha is like the fuel that causes the flame of our devotion to blaze up into a luminous fire. Faith gives flavour and fragrance to our devotions.

devoid of all soul and feeling. Shraddha is like the fuel that causes the flame of our devotion to blaze up into a luminous fire. Faith gives flavour and fragrance to our devotions. It makes our practices easy and enjoyable and most successful. Practice brings faith and faith helps us in our practices. The more we practise, the stronger will grow our faith, and when our faith is strong, strength, endurance, enthusiasm and success will follow. Therefore all the scriptures lay great stress on faith. *The Crest-Jewel of Discrimination* speaks of six graces. Faith is one of these. It is the greatest. With faith all the other graces are easily ob-

tained; they follow in its wake. For when there is faith the mind becomes restful and self-controlled; it withdraws from sense objects. There will then be endurance, and lastly, meditation will easily be attained.

And so Sri Krishna says that in His opinion those bhaktas should be regarded as the highest yogis, who with supreme faith adore Him, who always lovingly think of Him, and who practise perpetual devotion to Him.

But now comes another question: are not the jnanis, the worshippers of the Unmanifest, greater yogis than the bhaktas? Let us see what Sri Krishna has to say regarding them:

3. But those who contemplate the Imperishable, Indefinable, Unmanifest, Omnipresent, Unthinkable, Unchangeable, Immovable and Eternal—

4. Having subdued all the senses, even-minded everywhere, and engaged in doing good to all beings, verily they attain Me.

Now the Lord speaks of the jnanis. They contemplate the Absolute. They worship the Indefinable. Worship, or upasana, means approaching the object of worship by way of meditation on it, in accordance with the teachings of the shastras and the guru, and dwelling steadily in the current of one thought without break, as continuously as a stream of oil runs, poured from one vessel into another. They meditate in order to realize their own divine nature as being one with God. As the flame of a lamp burns without flickering when protected from the wind, so the yogi's mind shines steadily when protected from the wind of worldly desires. And how do they meditate on God? As the Imperishable Unmanifest, not accessible to words, and therefore not to be defined. He is not manifest to any of the organs of knowledge and therefore He is unthinkable. Because of His omnipresence, He is also immovable. And He is *kūṭastha*, that is, as explained by the commentators, the support of the phenomenal universe; He is the noumenon, the One seated in maya as its witness, as its lord, as Consciousness, never affected by maya.

Those who thus contemplate the Lord, curbing all their senses and always poised, whether they meet with fortune or misfortune, always peaceful, no matter where they are or what they do, never dejected and always engaged in doing good to others without selfish motive—verily such persons attain to Me. It needs no saying that they come to Me, for in verse 9.18 the Lord has spoken of such jnanis as wise men whom He regards as His very Self. And since they are one with the Lord Himself, it needs no saying that they are the best of yogis.

What then is Sri Krishna's answer to Arjuna's question? Sri Krishna has said in verse 2 that in His opinion the bhaktas, as there described, are the best versed in yoga. And now He says that the jnanis verily attain unto Him. Can there be anything higher than to attain unto Him? But both cannot be the highest. The answer, as we understand it, is that one is not better than the other. Both paths have their advantages, but they are for different persons. Those who find no satisfaction in worshipping the Personal God will naturally take to jnana. Others will feel attracted to the

path of bhakti. That will be for them the more natural course. It may be a longer route, but they find it much easier. It is like climbing a mountain. Some prefer to go straight up. The exertion is greater, but the path is shorter. They like to climb hard and reach the summit quickly. Others prefer the winding path, the gradual ascent, where there is not so much danger of losing one's footing. It is slower, but

surer. It depends on the individual. Some natures crave for love, others want knowledge. Both will reach the goal, each in the way best befitting him. And therefore it is not so much a question of comparison. They are both great. Each is great in his own way. Sri Krishna speaks in praise of both. But remember this, He says in the next verse:

5. Greater is their trouble whose minds are set on the Unmanifest, for the Unmanifest is a goal very hard to attain for the embodied.

We see from the context that the bhakta and the jnani reach the same goal, and therefore the one is not superior to the other. What is meant when Sri Krishna calls the worshippers of the qualified Brahman the best versed in yoga is that they have chosen the easier path. Great indeed is the trouble of those who are engaged in doing work for My sake, but greater still is the difficulty of those who identify themselves with the Absolute, with those who contemplate the supreme Reality. Why is it so? Because they must abandon all attachment to the body. The path of the jnani is almost insurmountable, and the reason is that we are embodied. We live in a body; we are closely connected with it, bound up with it, attached to it. Nay, we identify ourselves with it. All these wrong attitudes towards the body have to change. Our fear of losing it, our love for and attachment to it, must go. The jnani has to cut down all body-ideas; he has to forget the body. He must live in the Spirit. Jnana means identifying the soul with God, not with the body and ego. There is no room for the body-idea. 'So'ham, so'ham; I am the Spirit, I am the Spirit—that is his constant meditation. It is his business to forget the body in constant remembrance of his divine nature. Indifference towards the body, denying the body-idea, and identification with the Spirit—that is very difficult. It goes straight against nature. It is rowing against the tide. And only the strong are able

to succeed. Only those who have a steady and powerful stroke can swim against the current. Only the spiritually strong can realize the attributeless divine Essence. Only they will be able to attain an unbroken perception of the mysterious identity between the individual and the universal Spirit. The great difficulty lies in the abandonment of the identification of the soul with the body. The jnani must remember always that he is the Atman, beyond pleasure, beyond pain, beyond want of any kind, beyond health and disease, poverty and prosperity. He severs connection with all these conditions. When he has reached that state, then, though living in a body, he is beyond embodiment. Still in the body, he is free from it. To him the body has become like a shadow. He is free from fear, shame, passion, and all other bodily desires. Worldly existence appears to him like a dream. He is no longer frightened by the imaginary serpent; he sees the rope. He realizes that the wave and the foam and the bubble are in reality nothing but water. And so the body and all manifestation is only Consciousness, the one pure Consciousness, beyond mind and speech. He is no longer drunk with the wine of maya.

Later on Sri Krishna will describe the conduct of the jnanis; but first He posits the path of salvation through the worship of Ishvara, the Personal God.

(To be continued)

Role of Meditation in Hindu-Christian Dialogue

PROF. ARVIND SHARMA

I

Dialogue among religions presupposes that there are differences among religious traditions which need to be discussed. Thus the word 'dialogue' in an interfaith context possesses a special meaning, for in its ordinary meaning a dialogue is 'a conversation between two or more persons', which may or may not involve a discussion of differences. In an interfaith context, however, the term dialogue acquires the meaning of 'a discussion between representatives of parties to conflict that is aimed at resolution', and this is how we shall understand it for the rest of this essay. Conflict, whether we take the word in a weak sense or a strong sense, involves differences and some scholars have proposed that from such a perspective 'we may distinguish three aspects of this question: differences in modes of experiencing divine reality; differences of philosophical and theological theory concerning that reality or the implications of religious experience; and differences in the key or revelatory experiences that unify a stream of religious life'.¹

But while it may be argued that in these areas it is the differences among religions which stand out, there are at least two areas in which the similarities among religions are relatively more striking: those of morality and spiritual practice. It has often been pointed out, for instance, that the golden rule is found in some form or another among all the religions of the world. In fact a state in the USA recently even proclaimed itself as the golden rule state.

In terms of spiritual practice, meditation, in some form or other, seems to find a place in all religious traditions. When we then decide

to focus on the role of meditation in Hindu-Christian dialogue, we move into an area where the traditions are likely to display at least some broad similarities by virtue of the fact that meditational practices are common to all religions.

II

However, the fact that meditational practices may be common to all religions—including Hinduism and Christianity—does not mean that they have to be the same. They could well reflect patterns of both similarities and differences and it is often their simultaneous presence which makes the comparative study of religious traditions such an intellectual adventure.

I have found the use of *two sets of expressions* in the description of Christian and Hindu meditations of particular interest in such a context. In the case of Christianity this pair consists of the words *meditation* and *contemplation*.

The words can of course be used interchangeably and even confusedly but it has been proposed that

a working distinction between the two terms can be suggested. Meditation is considered preparatory and contributory to the achievement of contemplation. Meditation involves concentration, the narrowing of the focus of consciousness to a single theme, symbol, catechism, or doctrine, yet it remains cognitive and intellectual. Meditation is usually rumination on a particular religious subject, while contemplation is a direct intuitive seeing, using spiritual faculties beyond discursive thought and ratiocination.²

In this context the statement of a Christian theologian of the twelfth century, Richard of

Saint-Victor, is sometimes cited which runs as follows: 'Meditation investigates, contemplation wonders.' (Ibid.) One wonders to what degree the distinction corresponds to that between *dhyāna* and *samādhi* in Hinduism.

One notices that in the above discussion contemplation is accorded a somewhat higher place than meditation, which is confirmed by the observation made by Frederic B Underwood, that 'frequently, contemplation is itself a spiritual state, and serves as the end of an ascetic quest'. (Ibid.) He goes on to add that 'particularly in the monotheistic traditions of Judaism, Christianity, and Islam this state is sometimes considered tantamount to the beatific vision bestowed upon the individual through the grace of God'. (Ibid.)

A well-known distinction in Christian mysticism between the *apophatic* and the *catastrophic*, if injected into this discussion, gives it more substance. As many of you might well be aware, these expressions refer to the way we might proceed to describe a spiritual reality—by negation, that is, in the apophatic manner, and by assertion, that is, in the catastrophic manner. A broad analogy is provided by the descriptions of Brahman in the Upanishads which are sometimes couched in a negative mode as in the famous *neti neti*; and sometimes couched in a positive mode, as in *satyam jnanam anantam brahma*. But to revert to our discussion of meditation and contemplation, it is worth noting that 'meditation leading to contemplation can be apophatic. Involved here is an emptying procedure in which the individual systematically removes from consciousness any content that is not the object of his quest. In Christian mysticism, this type of path is referred to as the *vía negativa*; it is also an important technique in Buddhism.'

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If we now combine this paired distinction of apophatic-catastrophic with that other pair of meditation and contemplation, then one obtains a result such as the following: 'Apophatic forms of meditation tend to be

more speculative, cognitive, and intellectual, at least in their early stages. They tend to be centred in the mind. Catastrophic forms of meditation and contemplation, on the other hand, tend to be more emotional and devotional. They tend to be centred in the heart.' (Ibid.)

III

I would like to propose that a distinction may be drawn, within Hinduism, between concentration and meditation in a way which parallels the Christian distinction between meditation and contemplation. But I shall be using these English words in a somewhat special way in doing so—to make them fit the Hindu reality, as it were. To understand the basis of this distinction one must appeal to what Hinduism sees as the fundamental goal of spirituality—namely, to free the mind of all thoughts. It is true that at the end of the road we shall have to face the question: Is the mind to be emptied of all thoughts altogether, or is it to be emptied of all *irrelevant* thoughts? We shall cross that bridge when we come to it. It is clear that initially at least the task is to rid the mind of unwanted thoughts. In other words, we want to clean up the mind, which at the moment is like a dirty room.

The way we actually clean a dirty room offers a good example of the point one wishes to make. In order to clean a dirty room we essentially follow a twofold procedure. We collect the dirt lying around into a pile, or in several piles. Then, once the dirt has been thus collected, we carry it out of the room. The crucial point to bear in mind here is that we do not carry the dirt out one speck of dust at a time. We first *collect* all of it in a heap and *then* carry it out.

Similarly, when we wish to empty the mind of thoughts we do not proceed by trying to eject one thought at a time. We begin by heaping up all our thoughts, by piling them up and this process is called concentration. At the moment our mind is like a room with dust spread all over it. So first we put it all together,

that is to say, we try to achieve a state of consciousness in which there is only one thought in our mind. This is concentration. Once the mind is concentrated we also try to get rid of that one thought. This process I call meditation. So concentration consists of bringing all thoughts on one point and meditation consists of finally getting rid of this point also.

It is here that the fact that Hinduism, unlike Christianity, is both theistic and non-theistic becomes important. For in Christianity, by and large, one always retains God as a point of awareness so that getting rid of all thoughts becomes problematic. In Hinduism, however, the development of the doctrine of *nirguna brahman* allows the mind to be emptied of all thoughts including that of God.

What this means is that the distinction drawn in Christian mysticism between the apophatic and the cataphatic approaches can also be applied to Hinduism, but in a manner somewhat different from Christianity. The following point might help clarify the situation. In Hinduism the category of Brahman can be subdivided into that of *nirguna* and *saguna*, and that of *saguna* Brahman or Ishvara can be further subdivided into *nirakara* and *sakara*. So Brahman may be without attributes (*nirguna*) or with attributes (*saguna*), and then, Brahman with attributes may be described as without form (*nirakara*) or with form (*sakara*). The expression *nirguna bhakti* refers to devotion to such a formless understanding of God. Thus the apophatic and the cataphatic approaches, in principle, can be applied at both the levels, that of Brahman and that of Ishvara. The identification of this double-decker possibility in the use of the apophatic and the cataphatic approaches could be seen as one hermeneutical spin-off of Hindu-Christian dialogue.

IV

I would now, in this final section, explore another possibility. This possibility is rooted in the fact that all religions exhort us to eschew our ego in one way or another if we are going

to obtain the ultimate spiritual fruit offered by that tradition. Judaism emphasizes that life must be lived not in accordance with the whims of our ego but in accordance with divine law; Christianity emphasizes the need to dissolve our ego in the love of Christ or God; Islam by its very name calls upon us to surrender to the will of God; the various yogas of Hinduism are really various techniques of ego-transcendence; Buddhism attacks it by questioning its very existence; Confucianism wants it to be transformed from a self-regarding to an other-regarding entity; and Taoism would like to take its sting away by bringing it in harmony with the cosmos.

So in one way or another, doing away with our mundane empirical ego in some way is on the agenda of all of the world's religions. This point becomes significant for our present discussion when it is proposed that 'the experience of ultimate reality takes different forms according to the form taken by the death of the ego'.³ This suggestion, made by the Japanese Buddhist thinker, Professor Masao Abe, is worth examining in our context. For what we described as the getting rid of thoughts could as well as be described as getting rid of the ego—because the ego represents the primal 'I' thought. This empirical ego can be neutralized in various ways through spiritual practice; it can be put in its proper place, as it were, by aligning it with God through Christian meditation and contemplation, or its true nature could be radically tested through Hindu concentration and meditation. If one's obsession with the flickering candle of last night is coming in the way of welcoming the dawn which is breaking, then one could either just blow it out or watch the light of the candle be overwhelmed by the light of the morning sun. In the new brightness it is irrelevant whether the candle may be said to be still alight or should be deemed to have burnt itself out at any point. We would probably not even be bothered by the question in the new light which bathes the whole world.

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2. Frederic B Underwood, 'Meditation' in *The Encyclopedia of Religion*, ed. Mircea Eliade (New York: Macmillan, 1987), 9.325.
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Inter-religious Dialogue, Contemplative Paths, and the Vision of God

FR FRANCIS X CLOONEY, SJ

In his insightful essay, 'Role of Meditation in Hindu-Christian Dialogue', Professor Arvind Sharma suggests that

there are at least two areas in which the similarities among religions are relatively more striking: those of morality and spiritual practice. ... In terms of spiritual practice, meditation, in some form or other, seems to find a place in all religious traditions. When we then decide to focus on the role of meditation in Hindu-Christian dialogue, we move into an area where the traditions are likely to display at least some broad similarities by virtue of the fact that meditational practices are common to all religions.

He goes on to say, 'However, the fact that meditational practices may be common to all religions—including Hinduism and Christianity—does not mean that they have to be the same. They could well reflect patterns of both similarities and differences and it is often their simultaneous presence which makes the comparative study of religious traditions such an intellectual adventure.'

Prof. Sharma's subsequent consideration of meditation and contemplation in the Hindu and Christian traditions skilfully treats of preparatory meditative practice and advanced contemplation, the interplay of theistic and non-theistic spiritual paths, and the ways in which *nirguna* and *saguna* articulations of the meaning of practice both bring the traditions together and also properly distinguish them.

In the next few paragraphs I will not attempt to parse further Prof. Sharma's fruitful considerations, but develop a slightly different example that nicely illustrates and perhaps amplifies his point.

I begin with a day in late August 2003. I was in Chennai for a month of research, finishing a book on Hindu goddesses and the Virgin Mary, and beginning a new project as well. Prof. M Venkatakrishnan of the Department of Vaishnavism of the University of Madras invited me to give an endowed lecture for the students and staff of the department. I immediately decided to speak on my new project, just begun, on the *Srimad Rahasya-traya-sāra*, 'The Essence of the Three Auspicious Mysteries'. This spiritual classic by Vedanta Deshika (Venkatanatha; 1268-1369), though structured as an exegesis of the tradition's three holy mantras (*tiru mantra*, *dvaya mantra*, and *carama śloka* [verse 18.66 of the Bhagavad-gita]) is in fact also a compendium of all Srivaishnava theology, a distillation and elegant expression of Srivaishnava exegesis, philosophy, theology, practice and religious sociology, all woven into a single programme expressive of what it means to believe and take to heart the truths and values inscribed in the mantras. It is thus also a school of prayer, instruction for Srivaishnavas intended to guide them in total surrender to God in the act of *prapatti*; a proper understanding of the world, self, and God; a careful consideration of the

plight of humans who seek to live lives free from God; a realization that everything depends on God alone, and that there is no alternative to allowing oneself to fall, so to speak, into God's hands; a careful consideration of how individuals and the community can live their lives after the act of surrender; and how the true post-mortem destiny of devotees is nothing but divine bliss in heaven. The *Rahasya-traya-sāra* is a beautiful text, rich not only in insight, but also in the heartfelt appeal to the reader to see the world this way, allowing one's relation to God priority of time and place.

Such was the exposition I intended to make, with reference to various parts of the text, its commentaries, and so on. But Professor Venkatakrishnan made a special additional request, that I make the presentation a comparative venture, placing some aspect of Srivaishnavism next to some aspect of my own Roman Catholic and Jesuit tradition. In a way, I was surprised to hear this request—it was the Department of Vaishnavism, after all, not the Department of Christianity down the hall, where I had spoken on other occasions—but I also realized that since the professor had known me for some twenty years, he was accustomed to speak with me about the similarities and differences of our traditions. In any case, I decided to devote part of my lecture to an exposition of the *Spiritual Exercises*, the core document of the Society of Jesus, composed by St Ignatius Loyola (1491-1556), who had founded the Society.

On one level, an audience familiar with the two traditions might have expected a study in contrasts. After all, if Vedanta Deshika was thoroughly committed to Lord Narayana eternally accompanied by his beloved Sri, Ignatius was likewise committed to Jesus Christ and the truth of the path of the Gospels. The *Exercises* focus nearly entirely on Christ—his life and teachings, his sufferings and death, his glorious resurrection—and on the human condition seen anew in the light of

Christ. These meditations famously energized Ignatius and his early companions, most notably Francis Xavier, who was the first Jesuit to leave Europe and the first to travel to India, on fire with zeal to preach the Gospel to all nations. The paths of Deshika and Ignatius might then seem to be at cross purposes, falling rather into Prof. Sharma's understanding of dialogue as 'a discussion between representatives of parties to conflict that is aimed at resolution'.

Yet as I reflected on the *Rahasya-traya-sāra* and the *Exercises*, I began to see that both shared a common goal—to see God—and a common realization that for the sake of this blissful vision, we must acquire a clear knowledge of our world, including an understanding of all that is good and bad about our lives, particularly the ways we help and too often also hurt one another. On that moral basis, both Deshika and Ignatius tell us, we must gently but firmly probe our inner selves, even our deepest fears and desires, in order to become free from them. True wisdom, in both contemplative traditions, has to do with a gradual detachment from the world around us—not in the sense of a literal departure, but in the sense that we no longer confuse our selves with what we gain or lose in the process of living our daily lives. On the basis of that detachment, there arises a growing union with God, a graced 'sameness' by which we become intimate to God and God to us. Upon further reflection, I also realized that while no one could mistake Deshika's fourteenth-century Kanchipuram and Srirangam for Ignatius' sixteenth-century Spain and Rome, nonetheless they both shared the same high hope that detachment, wisdom, and union with God would radically transform the world, it being now ruled not by hatred, but by the instincts of love. So too, the end of one's life, if one is a thoroughly committed Sri-vaisnava, might seem very different from the way it appears to a committed Jesuit; yet even here, Deshika and Ignatius seemed to share a

sense that the ‘end of life’ is not the moment of death, however crucial that may seem, but the moment when one finally gives oneself over into God’s hands. After this, there is nothing else. Such were two traditions, clearly in dialogue, as it were, even before they met.

I was happy to draw a very specific comparison for my Srivaishnava audience at the University of Madras. In the twelfth chapter of the *Rahasya-traya-sāra*, in explaining the act of approach and surrender to the Lord, Deshika describes the manner and meaning of handing over one’s core identity to the Lord: The Lord Himself is the refuge, and He accepts our burden. He indicates that offering up of one’s burden is to be recognized as the primary action, when one utters the mantra of surrender. The Lord thus means the following: ‘With this mantra one should give over one’s self to Me. Whoever has given over to Me all that is to be done is a person who has already done all that must be done.’

To enrich our sense of what this surrender means, Deshika recalls the prayer of surrender uttered by an earlier teacher, Nadadur Ammal:

I have been wandering in this dreary world, age upon age without beginning, doing what is not desired by You. From this day forward, I must do what is conducive to reaching You, and I must cease from what is contrary. I have no resources by which to attain You. I have realized that You alone can be the means to my salvation. So You must be my means! If You are, how could there be, from now on, any burden, either in the removal of what is not desired or in the attainment of what is desired?

All concern about how to live or what to do is now in the hands of God alone.

For Ignatius, the *Exercises*’ prolonged and patient reflection on self and God, the life, death, and resurrection of Christ, climaxes in a moment of surrender to God that he expresses in these simple words (as translated by Louis Puhl, SJ):

(The retreatant should) recall to mind the bless-

ings of creation and redemption, and the special favours I have received. I will ponder with great affection how much God our Lord has done for me, and how much He has given me of what He possesses, and finally, how much, as far as He can, the same Lord desires to give Himself to me according to His divine decrees. Then I will reflect upon myself, and consider, according to all reason and justice, what I ought to offer the Divine Majesty, that is, all I possess and myself with it. Thus, as one would do who is moved by great feeling, I will make this offering of myself: ‘Take, Lord, and receive all my liberty, my memory, my understanding, and my entire will—all that I have and possess. You have given all to me: to You, O Lord, I return it. All is Yours, dispose of it wholly according to Your will. Give me Your love and Your grace, for this is sufficient for me.’

The insights that everything is in God’s hands and that surrender to God is the primary human act thus lie at the heart of both the Ignatian tradition and the Srivaishnava tradition.

How was my lecture that day? I cannot, of course, speak for my distinguished audience at the University of Madras; Professor Venkatakrishnan and others who were there would have to be the ones to report on how it turned out. But it seemed to me at least that one point had been made with some clarity: the Srivaishnava and Ignatian paths of spiritual practice, meditation, and surrender to God are wonderfully parallel, mutually illuminating, and—whatever the doctrinal differences of the traditions might be—intensely imagined and finely contoured paths leading devotees into dependence on God on an earth that is transformed right now, and thereafter to a place of bliss where God fully discloses the divine reality to the opened eyes of the devotee.

All of this can be taken, I hope, as a further specification and validation of Professor Sharma’s point on the importance and fruitfulness of the ‘dialogue of spiritual practice’. If his essay leads us to consider the non-dualist mystical path, where words and thoughts

eventually fail, I hope to have succeeded in proposing another, complementary example ripe for dialogue: the path of intelligent, attentive and wise devotion, hearts set on fire with love of God, a oneness with God that is not merely a metaphysical truth or eternal reality, but rather an amazing, continually given gift that is true because it keeps happening in grace, as good souls let go of themselves into God's hands. The dialogue will indeed be about meditation, contemplation, and spiritual practice, to be sure; but more deeply, it is also a conversation among those who are ex-

plicitly and permanently named as God's people—Srivaishnava or Christian, for example—and yet spend their time dialoguing across religious boundaries about how, in the end, God is in some way the topic of every conversation that really matters. Beyond the problems that divide us, all the more crucial is that we learn of God from one another. As Pope John Paul II put it when he spoke in Chennai on 5 February 1986, 'By dialogue we let God be present in our midst, for as we open ourselves to one another, we open ourselves to God.'

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Meditation according to Hinduism

SWAMI NITYASTHANANDA

Prof. Arvind Sharma has made a sincere and admirable attempt at a comparative study of meditation in the context of Hindu-Christian dialogue. It will go a long way in the sympathetic understanding of other religions and in fostering a brotherly relationship among different warring religious groups, provided they make an attempt to go into the central core of their own religions, instead of hanging on to external forms of religion, where differences and contradictions seem to be insurmountable. All practices prescribed in different religious traditions seem to converge in meditative awareness if we overlook inconsequential technical details. The author has tried to show how the practice of meditation can be the meeting ground for the adherents of Hinduism and Christianity, by highlighting the common points and providing an impetus for further investigation into the matter.

Herein a humble attempt is made to throw some light on the concept of meditation in Hinduism.

We are living in a dynamic world, where every particle is in constant flux. We cannot imagine a state where there is no action or

movement. Even the apparent state of inaction reveals intense activity when analysed scientifically. Still, there is an urge in man to be calm and silent without any activity, which induces him to go into the state of deep sleep every day. Meditation is an attempt to reach that state consciously, gradually reducing the number of thoughts and finally retaining only one thought in the mind.

Meditation is a special kind of concentration. In ordinary concentration, the mind is focused on one particular subject, and there can be many divergent thoughts related to that particular subject. Here the subject is one, but thoughts are many and dissimilar. For example, if one is reading a book on electricity and if his mind is concentrated, all his thoughts would centre on electricity alone. But in meditation there should be one subject and one thought related to that. Regarding this special kind of concentration, Swami Yatiswarananda says:

It is important to know the difference between ordinary concentration and meditation. By the word 'meditation' we mean *dhyāna* or contemplation. It is not just ordinary concentration. It is

a special type of concentration. In the first place, meditation is a fully conscious process, an exercise of the will. Secondly, meditation means concentration on a spiritual idea which presupposes that the aspirant is capable of rising above worldly ideas. And finally, meditation is done usually at a particular centre of consciousness. It is clear that true meditation is a fairly advanced state, attained after long practice. It is the result of long years of discipline.¹

If one is meditating on a particular divine form of Rama at a particular centre of consciousness, say the heart, then there would be a continuous flow of the same thought representing the divine form of Rama, to the exclusion of all other thoughts, even the thoughts related to Rama's qualities or his life. This continuous flow of one same thought is called meditation.

Normally there is a continuous flow of thoughts in our minds related to different objects, events and persons. If one thought represents one particular object, the subsequent one would be related to some other object or person. This state of mind is called *sarvārthatā* in Yoga literature. In contrast to this, the flow of similar thoughts pertaining to our particular object of meditation is called *ekāgratā*. As stated earlier, this is a higher form of concentration in which there will be different, but similar, thoughts representing one and the same object. As a result of quick succession of these thoughts, the object of meditation appears to be steady and, as the concentration deepens, the object becomes more vivid and bright. This is somewhat similar to the case when still pictures are taken and projected on the screen: the form on the screen appears to be one and steady though the images are different. This meditative state is described as *taila dharavat*, 'like a stream of oil'. According to Patanjali, '*Tatra pratyayaikatānatā dhyānam*; An unbroken flow of thoughts of that object (of meditation) is called *dhyāna*'.²

This is similar to *upāsanā* spoken of in Vedanta. Sri Shankaracharya gives a vivid description of *upāsanā* in his commentary on the

Bhagavadgita: '*Upāsanā*, or meditation, means approaching an object of meditation as presented by the scriptures, making it an object of one's own thought, and dwelling on it uninterruptedly for long by continuing the same current of thought with regard to it—like a stream of oil poured from one vessel to another.'³

The analogy of the stream of oil is very appropriate. When we pour oil from one vessel to another, there will be a constant flow of oil without any sound or splash. But when we pour water in similar fashion there is so much of noise and splash all around. If the current of thought flows towards the object of meditation in an uninterrupted stream without this kind of restlessness, that state is called meditation.

This state is reached only after one has passed through two other stages of meditation—*pratyāhāra* and *dhāraṇā*. *Pratyāhāra* consists in making the mind free from the clutches of the senses. The mind is always running after sense objects. When we see a particular object or hear a particular sound, the mind immediately grabs it and starts building a castle of thoughts. Same is the case when a particular thought arises in the mind. When we sit for meditation, the mind constantly goes away from the object of meditation, drawn by the objects of the senses. We withdraw the mind from these and fix it on the object of meditation. This withdrawal of the mind is called *pratyāhāra*. But the mind refuses to remain steady and starts wandering in the world of the senses. Again and again we withdraw it from the senses, and this struggle goes on for a long time, after which the mind becomes more steady and we are able to fix it on the object of meditation. This stage is called *dhāraṇā*. The object of meditation can be the divine form of our chosen deity, or some sound like the *pranava*, or a particular centre of consciousness like the heart or the region between the two eyebrows, and so on. When the mind remains fixed on the object of meditation for a

definite length of time, without being disturbed by any other thought, and the object of meditation becomes steady and vivid, then the mind is said to be in the state of meditation.

In this meditative state there are three things: the object of meditation, the process of meditation and the meditator. The meditator is aware of himself and the object, and there is self-direction too. But there is a still higher state of concentration called *samādhi*, in which the object alone shines so brightly that the meditator loses himself, as it were, being absorbed in the thought of the object and experiences ecstatic joy. Patanjali thus describes this state: '*Tadeva arthamātranirbhāsam svarūpaśūnyamiva samādhiḥ*; In the same meditative state, when the meditator loses himself, as it were, and the object of meditation alone shines forth—that is called *samādhi*'.⁴

There is a still higher state of consciousness where even this single thought of the object of meditation is eliminated and the Self is revealed in Its pristine purity without any qualification. Swami Vivekananda explains this with an appropriate illustration:

The bottom of a lake we cannot see, because its surface is covered with ripples. It is only possible for us to catch a glimpse of the bottom when the ripples have subsided, and the water is calm. If the water is muddy or is agitated all the

time, the bottom will not be seen. If it is clear, and there are no waves, we shall see the bottom. The bottom of the lake is our own true Self; the lake is the Chitta [mind] and the waves the Vrittis [thoughts].⁵

The true purpose of meditation is to know our true nature, the bedrock of our personality, by removing the accretions that cover it. This is done in stages, first by holding on to one thought to the exclusion of all other thoughts, and finally letting go of even that single thought.

This brief description of meditation in the light of Vedanta and Yoga philosophies is only to highlight the main aspects of meditation which may stimulate one to study the subject further.

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Ashoka on Religious Harmony

His Gracious Majesty, the Beloved of the Gods, does reverence to men of all sects, whether ascetics or householders, by gifts and various forms of reverence.

The Beloved of the Gods, however, cares not so much for gifts or external reverence, as that there should be a growth of the essence of the matter in all sects. The growth of the essence of the matter assumes various forms, but the root of it is restraint of speech. How? One must never glorify one's own sect or disparage that of another. ... Because the sects of other people all deserve reverence for some reason or other.

By thus acting man exalts his own sect, and at the same time does service to the sects of other people. By acting contrariwise a man hurts his own sect. Therefore, concord alone is correct. Let people hear about each other's faiths and do so over and over. ... Such is the wish of the Beloved of the Gods. How? Let the adherents of all faiths be learned and righteous.

—Rock Edict 12

The Concept of God in the Vedas

SWAMI TATTWAMAYANANDA

The composite fabric of Vedic religion has been woven out of various shades of belief systems and forms of worship. This has given birth to multifarious concepts of the supreme Reality ranging from exuberant pantheism and polytheism to the most abstract type of monistic Advaitism.

It is almost impossible to define the Vedas without reference to the concepts of *dharma* and *brahman*. The well-known synonyms of the Veda, *śruti* and *āmnāya*, make this point clear. The term *śruti* is defined as '*śrūyete dharmādharmau anayā iti śrutiḥ*'; that by which one learns about dharma and adharma is shruti', and *āmnāya* as '*āmnāyate upadiṣyate dharma ityanena*'; that by which one is instructed in dharma'. Shankaracharya's definition is more philosophical, scientific, and essentially monistic:

अत्र ऋगादि वेदास्तप्रतिपत्त्यर्थं विचारं कुर्वन्तीति
वेदारथ्यमवाप्न्युः । अथवा सद्गावं साधयन्तीति वेदाः ।
अथवा ब्रह्माधारं परमात्मानं लभन्त इति वेदाः ।

'Herein, the Rig and other Vedas discuss That (Brahman) with a view to Its attainment; or they establish the existence (of Brahman); or they lead to the Paramatman that rests on Brahman, and are therefore termed Veda.'¹

In other words, Veda is that by the study of which we attain the knowledge of Brahman. Since the Sanskrit root *vid* can mean 'to know', 'to experience', 'to discover' or 'to learn', Shankaracharya's definition seems to be more comprehensive and relevant from the standpoint of the evolution of the concept of God in Vedic literature.

Vedic Concept of God

The Vedic literature reveals the origin, progress and culmination of man's concept of God or the ultimate Reality: from polytheism

to monotheism and from monotheism to monism; from the many with names and forms to the one impersonal Reality that is beyond name and form.

The Rig Vedic concept of the ultimate Reality is unique. It has monistic as well as dualistic components. The whole process of creation and evolution of nature (from a primeval state) is expressed in mythological language in the Rig Veda. Parallel to the evolution of the concept of Reality, we can also see the progress of the concept of God. The Vedic mind is seen to progress from prayers for long and happy life (*paśyema śaradāḥ śatam jivema śaradāḥ śatam*) to lofty idealism. There are verses in which the devotee asks various deities for wealth, intelligence and prosperity. For instance, '*Dhiyām pūṣā jinvatu ...*; May Pūṣan, who is the benefactor of all, be propitious.'² On the other hand, in some verses the rishi says that the same god (Agni) appears in various forms as Indra, the giver of rains, Viṣṇu, who, dwelling within the hearts of all, protects the world, and so on. Several mantras in the Upanishads and several Vedic suktas describe the evolution of the Vedic mind. The *Kena Upanishad*, for example, asks: '*Kenesitam patati presitam manah?* Willed by whom does the directed mind go towards its object?'

Though it can be argued that the central theme of the Rig Veda Samhita is the propitiation of gods and goddesses (devas and devis), yet behind these multifarious rituals and hymns runs the thread of gradual evolution of the concept of spiritual life. In most Vedic suktas the gods are depicted as the controlling and presiding powers behind natural phenomena, such as rain, storm and thunder. Very often, the same characteristics are attributed to various deities. The Vedic seers saw

the moon, the stars, the sea, the sky, the dawn and nightfall as divine phenomena and not as integral parts of lifeless nature. Saraswati is described as '*nadirūmī śuci*; sacred and pure among rivers'. (7.95.2) The rivers Vipash and Shutudri (modern Beas and Sutlej) are described as rushing to the ocean as charioteers (to their goal) at the behest of Indra: '*Indreśite ... samudram rathyeva yāthah*'. (3.33.2) Sometimes, it is asserted that the Reality behind the fire principle is one; the same Truth is behind the sun which illuminates the universe; the same Reality underlies Uṣas which makes everything effulgent, and so on. In the tenth mandala there is a mantra where the question is raised:

कृत्यमयः कृति सूर्यासः
कृत्युषासः कृत्युर्सिवदापः ।
नोपस्थितं वः पितरो वदामि
पृथग्नामि वः कवयो विद्वने कम् ॥

'How many are the fires, how many suns, how many dawns, how many waters? I address you, O *pitr̄s* (ancestors), not for the sake of disputation; I ask you sages, in order to know (the truth).' (10.88.18)

In reply to this, there is the mantra in the eighth mandala where the unity of the divine principle is established:

एक एवाग्निबहुधा समिद्ध
एकः सूर्या विश्वमनुप्रभूतः ।
एकैवोषाः सर्वमिदं विभाति
एकं वा इदं वि वभूव सर्वम् ॥

'Agni is one though ignited in various forms, the one sun rises in all the worlds, the one dawn lights up all this; the One alone has become all this.' (8.58.2)

In the *Nirukta*, Yaskacharya has defined the word 'deva' as follows:

देवो दानाद्वा दीपनाद्वा योतनाद्वा द्युस्थानो भवतीति वा ।

'A deva is one who gives gifts (*devo dānāt*), who is effulgent (*devo dipanāt*), who illuminates (*devo dyotanāt*), and who resides in heaven or the celestial world (*dyusthāne bhavati iti*).'³

The word *īśa* is defined by Yaska as '*īśe iti īśah*; because he controls and rules over the

whole creation, he is called *īśa*'. Following the first definition given for the word 'deva', the word *īśa* is defined as one who bestows the eight powers like *animā* (the capacity to turn infinitesimally small), *garimā* (the power to become massive in size), and the like. According to the *Brahmavaivartaka Purana*, Ishvara is one who rules, controls and bestows powers:

ईश्वरः ईशानः एतानि ईशते । ऐश्वर्यदानात् ईश्वरः ॥

To the ordinary man living in this world, external phenomena, which he perceives with his senses, constitute the only reality. So far as he is concerned God, whom he cannot see or hear, is just a word. As he progresses in rational thinking and evolves spiritually he realizes that the world-phenomena that he sees around him are always in a flux and therefore, being impermanent, cannot be the ultimate Reality. So he may consider this world as something inexplicable or indefinable. But when one reaches the highest level of philosophical contemplation and spiritual evolution one realizes that this phenomenal world is real only in a relative sense. God is the only true Reality; everything else is ephemeral.

The Mimamsakas consider the *devatā* as the very embodiment of the respective mantra. This idea has a special significance from the point of view of spiritual practice. In the beginning the aspirant considers the particular deity as *saguṇa* (with attributes) and *sākāra* (with form), the very personification of the meaning of the particular mantra. But gradually, he elevates himself to a higher position and progresses to the next stage of realization. Here the aspirant prays to the Lord (with form):

हिरण्यमेन पात्रेण सत्यस्यापिहितं मुखम् ।
तत्त्वं पूजन्नपावृणु सत्यधर्माय दृष्टये ॥

'By the lid of the golden orb is your face hidden. Please remove it, O nourisher of the world, so that I may see you, I who am devoted to Truth.'⁴

Yaska's *Nirukta* discusses the question whether *devatās* have (human) form or not. After discussing the three different views

(namely, they have form, they do not have form, and a combination of these two views), the *Nirukta* finally concludes that, in reality, there is only one *devatā* who can be addressed in various ways depending upon the temperament of the aspirant. In fact, our concept of the Godhead is largely determined by our cultural milieu, intellectual make-up, and spiritual stature. That is why the Mimamsakas argue that the *devatā* is of the form of the mantra itself.

Most of the hymns of the Rig Veda, addressed to various gods and goddesses for help and protection, are prayers at various stages of evolution. In the fifth mandala, for example, there is a prayer where the sage prays to Indra, Varuna, Mitra and Agni for a happy life in this world:

तन्न इन्द्रो वरुणो मित्रो
अग्निराप औषधीवर्णिनो जुषन्ति ।
शर्मन्त्स्याम मरुतामुपस्थे
यूयं पात स्वस्तिभिः सदा नः ॥

'May Indra, Varuna, Mitra, Agni, the waters, the herbs, and the trees be pleased (by our praise); may we, (resting) in the lap of the Maruts, enjoy felicity; do thou ever cherish us with blessings.'⁵

Here, there is an echo of the monotheistic ideal. The same God appears in the form of Indra, Varuna and others. The seer expects that the gods will be pleased to hear his hymn.

Evolution of the Concept of God

In most of the hymns referring to various gods such as Sūrya, Agni, and so on, we can find the underlying divine principle to be the same Paramatman. The glory of the various gods and goddesses is, in fact, the glory of the same divine Reality. This idea is explained in the form of a story in the *Kena Upanishad* (belonging to the Sama Veda tradition). The Upanishad tells us that when gods like Agni and Vāyu, forgetting that it was really Brahman's power that gave them strength to do various deeds, became proud of their mistaken greatness, Brahman appeared before

them in the form of a *yakṣa* and taught them humility. The Rig Veda also states that all gods and goddesses are under the control of Brahman:

ऋचो अक्षरे परमे व्योमन्
यस्मिन् देवा अधि विश्वे निषेदुः ।

'All the gods have taken their seat upon the Supreme Space (in the form) of the imperishable *r̄ks* (Vedas).'⁶

At one stage, the Vedas speak of thirty-three different deities. The important principle behind the concept of Vedic gods and goddesses is that they are all reflections and manifestations of the one God. According to the *Shatapatha Brahmana*, these thirty-three deities include eight Vasus, eleven Rudras, twelve Ādityas, Dyaus, and Prithvi.

In the *Brihadaranyaka Upanishad*, sage Yajnavalkya tells Shakalya: 'In reality there are only thirty-three gods; the others are only their manifestations (*mahimānah*).'⁷ To the question from Shakalya, 'Which are those thirty-three gods?' Yajnavalkya replies: 'The eight Vasus, eleven Rudras, twelve Ādityas, Indra and Prajāpati are the thirty-three gods.'⁸ In the beginning Yajnavalkya had enumerated the number of gods as three hundred and three, and three thousand and three but, on repeated questioning, finally scales down their number to just one—Prāṇa identified with Brahman.

A sukta in the third mandala addressed to Agni says:

त्रीणि शता त्री सहस्राण्यमिन्द्रिं
त्रिंशत्च देवा नव चासपर्यन् ।
ओक्षन् घृतैरस्तुन् बहिरस्मा
आदिद्वोतारम् न्यसादयन्त ॥

'Three thousand three hundred and thirty-nine divinities have worshipped Agni; they have sprinkled him with melted butter, they have spread for him the sacred grass, and have seated him upon it as their ministrant priest.'⁸

Agni is the symbol of Paramatman and all the other gods are different aspects or manifestations of the same Agni. According to

many scholars, the most appropriate Vedic symbol for the supreme position among the innumerable Vedic gods is Agni. Agni is the fire principle that shines in the sun and also the one who carries our offerings to other gods. He is the friend of man and mediates on his behalf. He is the symbol of wisdom, knowledge, compassion and lordship. That was the reason he was worshipped by three thousand three hundred and thirty-nine gods.

Suktas like the one which begins with '*Tvamagne prathamo aigira; You, Agni, were the first Aṅgiras rishi'* (1.31.1) and the one which begins with '*Tvamagne dyubhistam; You Agni ... pure and all-radiating'* (2.1.1) portray Agni as the embodiment of omnipotence and omniscience. The god Pavamāna Soma, in fact, is Agni himself. Soma is symbolic of Brahman and realizing Pavamāna is nothing but realizing Brahman.

In the Vedic and Vedantic tradition the ultimate supreme Reality is designated (though it is beyond description or definition) as *sat-chit-ananda*. According to the Rig Vedic sages Agni, Sūrya and Soma are the symbols of *sat*, *chit* and *ananda* respectively. In other words Agni, Sūrya and Soma together constitute Satchidananda. Sometimes *sat* and *chit* are described as aspects of *ananda*, especially in the Upanishads (for instance '*Ānando brahmēti vyajānāt; (He) knew bliss as Brahman*'⁹). Perhaps, that is why a whole mandala is devoted exclusively to Soma. The Rig Veda Samhita says:

सोमः पवते जनिता मर्तीनां
जनिता दिवो जनिता पृथिव्याः ।
जनिताग्नेजनिता सूर्यस्य
जनितोत विष्णोः ॥

The Soma flows, the generator of praises, the generator of Heaven, the generator of Earth, the generator of Agni, the generator of the Sun, the generator of Indra, and the generator of Viṣṇu.¹⁰

The Rig Vedic Gods

It may be remarked here that some of the

important and well-known deities of popular Hinduism do not appear prominently in the Rig Veda Samhita. This view is based on the number of suktas used to propitiate the individual gods. But we must remember that deities like Viṣṇu and Śiva who became very prominent during the Puranic period had their origin in the Rig Veda itself.

It is said that devas are born of Aditi and *dasyus*, who stand in opposition to them, are born to Diti. They are the lords of light and darkness respectively. The Rig Veda describes Aditi as *svarga*, as *antarikṣa*, and as the mother of the universe. (1.89.10)

Viṣṇu

Yaskacharya, in his *Nirukta*, defines Viṣṇu as '*viṣṇu viśateḥ*; one who enters everywhere', and '*yad visito bhavati tad viṣṇur-bhavati*; that which is free from fetters and bondages is Viṣṇu.' Viṣṇu is also characterized as '*vevesṭi vyāpnoti viśvām yah*; the one who covers the whole universe, or is omnipresent, is Viṣṇu.' The word itself originates from the root *vīś* meaning 'to enter'. In other words Viṣṇu can be considered the omnipresent dimension of the supreme Lord.

The 'Viṣṇu Sukta' of the Rig Veda (1.154) mentions the famous three strides of Viṣṇu so well known in later iconography and legends associated with this god. It is said that the first and second of Viṣṇu's strides (those encompassing the earth and air) are visible to men and the third is in the heights of heaven (sky). The second mantra of the 'Viṣṇu Sukta' says that within the three vast strides of Viṣṇu all the various regions of the universe live in peace:

उरुषु त्रिषु विक्रमणेषु विश्वा भुवनानि अधिक्षयन्ति ।

Here Viṣṇu is praised and his uniqueness and greatness are compared to that of the mighty lion who lives on top of a forested hill. Besides the praise of strength, glory and power, we can also notice the gradual evolution of the spiritual aspect (omniscience) of the Godhead. The Vedic seer prays to Lord Viṣṇu

to enable him to reach his high abode, which is also the abode of spiritual bliss:

तदस्य प्रियमभिपाठो अश्यां
नरो यत्र देवयतो मदन्ति ।
उरुक्रमस्य स हि बन्धुरित्था
विष्णोः पदे परमे मध्व उत्सः ॥

'May I attain his favourite path in which god-seeking men delight—(the path) of Viṣṇu with giant strides, in whose exalted station is a (perpetual) flow of felicity—for he is truly a friend (to all).' (1.154.5)

According to the Vedic sages this universe is constituted of three different planes of existence: the *dyuloka* (celestial plane) presided over by the deity Savitṛ or Sūrya; *antarakṣaloka* (intermediary space) presided over by Indra or Vāyu; and the *bhūrloka* (terrestrial plane) presided over by the deity Agni.

Indra

Indra is one of the important Rig Vedic gods and is described as '*Yo jāta eva prathamo manasvān*; He who, from his very birth, is the first (of the deities)' (2.12.1). Indra is the lord of the universe. The idea of an omniscient and omnipresent Godhead is also applied to Indra when he is addressed as '*āśrutkarna*; whose ears hear all things' (1.10.9).

Vāyu

The Rig Veda calls the presiding deity of the wind as Vāta or Vāyu. The god when conceived as the element (*vāta*) is described as moving wherever he wants, at his pleasure. Describing it as the soul and indweller of other gods, a sukta in the tenth mandala says that we can hear his rushing sound but we are not able to see his form:

आत्मा देवानां भुवनस्य गर्भे
यथावशं चरति देव एषः ।
घोषा इदस्य शृणिवरे न रूपं
तस्मै वाताय हविषा विधेम ॥

'The soul of the gods, the germ of the world, this divinity moves according to his pleasure; his voices are heard, his form is not

(seen); let us worship that Vāta with oblations.' (10.168.4)

The wind god, Vāyu, conceived as god in contrast to the elemental wind, is called 'the messenger of gods':

आ वात वाहि भषजं वि वात वाहि यद्रपः ।
त्वं हि विश्वभेषजो देवानां दूत ईयसे ॥

'O Vāta, bring us medicinal balm; blow away all evil; you are the universal medicine; you move as the messenger of the gods.' (10.137.3)

Mitra and Varuṇa are two deities who, on occasions, appear as friends. Mitrā-Varuṇa are supposed to be the guides and protectors of *rta*. But in some later suktas, Mitra is associated with the light of dawn and *ākāśa* of night.

Rudra, who came to be known as Śiva in the Puranas, also appears in the Rig Veda. (4.3)

The Vedic gods are not depicted as independent of the rest or opposed to each other. Thus both Varuna and Sūrya are sometimes presented as being subordinate to Indra. Varuṇa and the Aśvins are often subordinate to Viṣṇu. A god who is praised along with others may be elevated to a supreme position in another context. For instance, Varuṇa, the controller of *rta*, literally controls 'the course of events and things'. In Rig Vedic literature *rta* is often used to mean dharma, which, as the stabilizing influence in all spheres of individual and collective life, is the bedrock of Indian culture.

(To be concluded)

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Life and Teachings of Buddha: Some Gleanings

DR SATISH K KAPOOR

The historical founder of Buddhism is also known as Gotama, Siddhartha Gautama, Sakyamuni ('sage of the Sakya clan') or Bhagavan Buddhadeva. The six Buddhas ('enlightened ones') traditionally believed by the Theravadins to have preceded him are: Vipassin, Sikhin, Vessabhu, Kakusandha, Konāgamana and Kassapa. The Buddha who is still to come to redeem mankind is Metteyya (Maitreya).

'Do not seek to know Buddha by his form or attributes; for neither the form nor the attributes are the real Buddha. The true Buddha is enlightenment itself. The true way to know Buddha is to realize enlightenment,' so goes the *Avatarasaka Sūtra*.¹ Traditionally, Buddha's body is said to have three aspects: *dharma-kāya*, or aspect of essence; *saṁbhoga-kāya*, or aspect of potentiality; and *nirmāṇa-kāya*, or aspect of manifestation. *Dharma-kāya* forms the substratum of dharma, virtue and truth, and permeates the entire universe. *Saṁbhoga-kāya* denotes the nature of Buddha characterized by wisdom and compassion. It manifests through the 'symbols of birth and death'. *Nirmāṇa-kāya* signifies the physical birth of Buddha for the redemption of humanity.²

Buddha's Life

Indian society in the sixth century BCE was riddled with rituals, superstitions and caste distinctions. Religion had become expensive and complicated, and the common man resented the dominance by the priestly classes, the performance of sacrificial rites, self-torture, and expensive yajnas. 'Monotheism of the crudest type—fetishism, from anthropomorphic deism to transcendental dualism—was rampant. So was materialism, from

sensualism to transcendental nihilism.'³ In this milieu, Buddha appeared in order to free Indian society from the metaphysical jargon of intellectuals, the religious dogmas of priests and the authority of the upper castes. The *Mahāparinibbāna Sutta* says in this context: 'The fact that Buddha appears and disappears can be explained by causality: namely, when causes and conditions are not propitious, Buddha seems to disappear from the world.'

Buddha was born as Siddattha Gotama to King Suddhodana, chief of the Sakya clan, and Queen Mahamaya of the Koliya clan, on the full-moon day of Visākha in the Lumbini grove (Kapilavatthu; modern Rumindesi, Nepal Terai) in about 566 BCE. Much before his birth, the queen had had a dream that she would have a son having divine traits. Court astrologers predicted the same. When the child was born, thirty-two auspicious marks (*mahāvyañjanas*) were found on his body which included, among others, long ears and arms, webbed hands, pendant earlobes, a tuft of hair between the eyebrows, a mole on the right side of the breast and signs of the wheel (*cakka*) and lotus (*kamala*) on the palms and soles. The sacred tree, *udumbara* (*ficus glomerata*), which, it is believed, puts forth a unique blossom when a Buddha is born, flowered again. This confirmed that he was no ordinary child and would bring deliverance to the whole world. A brahmin priest who visited the palace to see the child predicted that he might renounce family life. Alarmed by this, the king tried to ensure that his son remained engrossed in the pleasures of the world.

The child Buddha was brought up by Pajāpati Gotami, the second wife of Suddhodana, as his mother had died within a

few days of his birth. He was a prodigy and impressed everyone in the palace with his insightful queries. Buddhist biographies (second century CE) like the *Buddhacarita* and *Lalitavistara* mention that even though the prince grew up in an atmosphere of luxury, he remained impervious to worldly things. He was married to Yasodhara, a beautiful Sakyā princess, at the young age of sixteen or seventeen (according to Pāli canonical texts) and had a son named Rahula. But nothing could tie him down to mundane pursuits.

Buddhist chroniclers refer to the Four Great Signs which influenced him greatly. While accompanying his charioteer Canna, he came across some heart-rending scenes of misery, agony, disease and death, and realized that the world was full of sorrow and suffering, and that he would one day meet the same fate as others.⁴ In order to explore the misery of human life and find a lasting solution to it, he decided to leave home at the age of twenty-nine. One night, when his wife and son were fast asleep, he slipped out of the palace and reached Vesāli, where he became a disciple of Ālāra Kālāma (also known as Ārāḍa Kālāma), a scholar of the Sankhya school of philosophy. Ālāra introduced him to the philosophy of the Upanishads and also taught him the techniques of meditation. But his quest for the ultimate Reality could not be fulfilled, and he left him with five brahmin ascetics. Thereafter he proceeded towards Rājagaha (Rajgir) and studied more scriptures under the guidance of Uddaka Rāmaputta. For about six years he practised the severest austerity and penance in the Uruvela forest (near modern Bodh Gaya, Bihar, on the banks of the Nerañjarā River), but did not find peace. Ultimately, abandoning the path of self-mortification he sat under a banyan tree in Gaya in deep meditation and gained enlightenment (*sainthood*). Hereafter he became known as Buddha, or 'the Enlightened One'; the banyan tree came to be called the Bodhi tree and the place, Gaya, became famous as Bodh Gaya.

In order to share his divine Knowledge with people, Buddha went to Migadāya or Jetavana (Deer Park) at Isipatana (Sarnath) near Varanasi. His first sermon, which is popularly called the *Dhammacakka Pavattana Sutta*, or the ideological thread which sets in motion the wheel of dharma (*dhamma*), was given to the five ascetics—Assaji, Upāli, Moggallāna, Sāriputta and Ānanda—who had left him when he finally realized the futility of harsh austerities. They now became his disciples. Buddha preached most of his sermons at Sāvatthi and won many adherents to his new faith including the rich trader Anāthapindika, who provided financial backing to the Buddhist order (*saṅgha*). He also visited Mathurā, Rājagaha, Pāṭaliputra (Patna) and other places to deliver his message. Kings like Bimbisāra and Ajātasattu (of Magadha), Udena (of Kosambi) and Pasenadi (of Kosala) found solace in the Middle Path preached by him. His son and foster-mother accepted him as guru when he visited Kapilavatthu.

Buddha passed away on a Visākha Punṇama (full moon) day after a brief illness around 483 BCE. He was cremated by the Mallas and his mortal remains came to be divided among eight claimants, namely the Mallas of Kusinārā and Pāvā, Sakyas of Kapilavatthu, Koliyas of Rāmagāma, Licchavis of Vesāli, Bulis of Allakappa, two brahmins of Vethadipaka, Ajātasattu of Magadha and Moriyas of Pippalivana. Reliquary monuments called stupas were raised over them to denote his eternal presence.

His Teachings

Buddha's discourses show that he possessed penetrating intelligence, which often manifested in the Socratic form of questions, parables and sutras. He taught in accordance with the capacity of his listeners (*upāyakauśalya*). Once he was rebuked by a householder when he approached him for alms. Without getting angry he asked: 'Friend, if a householder gives food to a beggar but the

beggar refuses to accept it, to whom does the food belong?" 'To the householder, of course,' came the reply. Buddha then remarked: 'If I refuse to accept your abuse and ill will, it returns to you, does it not?'

Buddha taught his disciples to be free from the bondage of desire, the lusts of the flesh, the shackles of selfishness and the urges of the lower self. He decried the shallowness of intellectuals and admonished his disciples to stay away from the pedagogy of theorists which did not lead one anywhere.

The Four Noble Truths

His teachings were based on the Fourfold Noble Truths. First, the Truth of Suffering (*dukkha*), which manifests through events of birth and death, sickness and separation, and vain struggles to find peace in worldly objects. 'Old age is suffering, illness is suffering, being in contact with that which one dislikes is suffering, being separated from that which one likes is suffering, failure to realize one's desires is suffering.'⁵ Second, the Truth of the Cause of Suffering (*dukkha samudaya*), which lies in the urges of the human body and the delusions of human passions. 'It is the thirst for being that leads from birth to birth... the thirst for pleasure, the thirst for power' (1.6.20) Third, the Truth of the Cessation of Suffering (*dukkha nirodha*), which is possible if one can annihilate desire. 'The extinction of this thirst (should be made) by complete annihilation of desire, letting it go, expelling it, separating oneself from it, giving it no room.' (1.6.21) And finally, the Truth of the Eightfold Noble Path (*atthāṅga magga*) to the cessation of the Cause of Suffering (*dukkha-nirodha-gāminī-patipādā*). This consists of *sammā dīṭṭhi* (right view), *sammā saṅkappa* (right intention), *sammā vācā* (right speech), *sammā kammanto* (right action), *sammā ājivo* (right livelihood), *sammā vāyāmo* (right effort), *sammā sati* (right mindfulness) and *sammā samādhi* (right concentration). 'There is no suffering for him who has finished his journey and abandoned grief, who has

freed himself on all sides, and thrown off all fetters.'⁶

Dependent Origination (*Paṭicca Samuppāda*)

Ignorance about the Four Noble Truths leads to *avijjā*, which is the cause of one's entanglement in worldly activities. Buddha explained it thus: *Avijjā* gives rise to predispositions (*saṅkhārā*), which result in consciousness (*vिज्ञाना*). From *विज्ञाना* springs separate being as name and form (*nāma-rūpa*), which give rise to the six seats of the senses (*salāyatana*). This is followed by contact (*phassa*), which generates sensation (*vedanā*). From *vedanā* springs craving (*taihā*) giving rise to grasping (*upādāna*). From *upādāna* emerges becoming (*bhava*). From *bhava* rises birth (*jāti*), which leads to disease, depression, old age and death (*jarā-maraṇa*). The *Dhammapada* says in this context: 'Laziness is the ruin of homes; idleness is the ruin of beauty; negligence is the ruin of the watchful; unchastity is a stain on a woman; miserliness is a stain on the donor; to do evil is a stain in this and other worlds. But greater than all these stains, ignorance is the worst of all.' (241.3)

Karma

The doctrine of karma is an essential part of the gospel of Buddha. The present is determined by past actions and the future by the present. Each individual can make or mar his destiny depending on his actions. All karmas are rooted in will and can be destroyed only through will. Karmas are of two types, *sāsavā* and *anāsavā*; the former, associated with passion, produce effects, both good and bad, and the latter, undefiled by passions, are implied in the Four Noble Truths. Karmas relate to body (*kāya karma*), speech (*vacī karma*) and mind (*mano karma*). The quality of the karmas determines their disposition. A popular verse often ascribed to Buddha says: 'Na prañasyanti karmāṇi kalpa-koti-śatairapi; Sāmagrīm prāpya kālām ca phalanti khalu dehinām. Karmas do not

perish even after the lapse of a million years. They fructify without fail when time and environment are suitable.'

Buddha likened the world to 'a bubble of water', to 'the gossamer web of a spider', to 'the defilement in a dirty jar', and so on. The *Vajrachchedikā Sūtra* says: 'Stars, darkness, a lamp, a phantom, dew, a bubble, a dream, a flash of lightning and a cloud—thus should we look upon the world.' Given the conditions, the human mind should be disciplined in a manner that it can be tuned to spiritual development. But the mind, like an ape, is 'forever jumping about, not ceasing even for a moment'. To contain it and gain enlightenment, one needs to open the sluice gates of one's being to 'the fragrant incense of faith'.

The Middle Path (*Majjhimā Paṭipadā*)

Buddha asked people to shun the two extremes of self-indulgence and self-torture and follow the Middle Path. He laid emphasis on such human virtues as *dāna* (charity or benevolence), *sīla* (moral goodness), *khanti* (patience or forbearance), *viriya* (fortitude) and *paññā* (knowledge). He regarded *ahiṁsā* (non-violence), *mettā* (loving friendship), *karuṇā* (compassion), *muditā* (cheerfulness) and *upekħā* (non-attachment) as the means to righteous living. Hatred must be conquered by love, evil by goodness and greed by liberality. The real treasure of man is laid up through piety, temperance and self-control. The ten ethical precepts of Buddha are: be merciful, do not kill; do not steal; do not commit adultery; do not tell lies; do not slander; do not speak harshly to anyone; do not engage in idle talk; do not keep an eye on others' wealth; do not hate; and think righteously.

Nibbāna

Buddha preached *nibbāna* (perfect tranquillity) as the summum bonum of the life of man. Salvation was not a matter of 'a shaven crown' or ritualistic acts. One could attain it not by propitiating deities but by righteous

deeds marked by restraint. 'Restraint in the eye is good, good is restraint in the ear; in the nose restraint is good, good is restraint in the tongue. In the body restraint is good, good is restraint in speech; in thought restraint is good, good is restraint in all things.' (360-1) *Nibbāna* is the perfect state in which all human defilements, passions and cravings are completely extinguished. By strictly following the various Buddhistic disciplines one can move from the ephemeral world to the world of permanence, of enlightenment. This is called *pāramita*, or 'crossing over to the other shore'. None can otherwise accomplish the five following things: to cease growing old, to cease being sick, to cease dying, to deny extinction and to deny exhaustion. The four eternal truths, an understanding of which prepares the stage for *nibbāna*, are: All living beings rise from ignorance; All objects of desire are impermanent; all phenomena are transitory; Nothing in the world is 'mine'.

Rational Religion

Buddha denounced the religious basis of caste, ridiculed the claims of members of the priestly class as mediators between God and man, and maintained silence over the existence of God. But he believed in rebirth. In his philosophy there was no place for heaven or hell, worship or ritual, dry theology and metaphysics. He exhorted his disciples to attain the supreme state through self-purification. 'Better than sovereignty over the earth, better than going to heaven, better than lordship over all worlds is the reward of the first step in holiness.' (178) Besides, he wanted people to keep an unprejudiced mind and weigh everything on the scales of reason. 'Do not believe in what you have heard, do not believe in doctrines because they have been handed down to you through generations; do not believe in anything because it is followed blindly by many; ... Have deliberation and analyse, and when the result agrees with reason and conduces to the good of one and all, accept it and

live up to it,' he said.⁷

The Saṅgha

Buddha founded the *saṅgha* ('religious order') of his disciples to propagate his faith. Initially he was not inclined to admit women but gradually changed his mind due to the insistence of his chief disciple Ananda and his foster-mother. The *saṅgha* comprised of monks (*bhikkhus*), nuns (*bhikkhunis*), male householders (*upāsakas*) and female householders (*upāsikās*). Run on democratic lines, the *saṅgha* had a strict code of conduct for monks and nuns. The criterion for joining the *saṅgha* was a threefold declaration: '*Buddham saranam gacchāmi; Saṅgham saranam gacchāmi; Dhammam saranam gacchāmi.* I take refuge in Buddha; I take refuge in the *saṅgha*; I take refuge in the *dharma*.' Among the first to join the order of *bhikkhunis* was his wife Yasodhara.

In his last words to his disciples, Buddha advised them to have faith in themselves (*attasarano*), to be their own lamps (*attadipo*), and to work out their own salvation. The true Buddha is not a human body—it is Enlightenment. A human body must vanish, but the Wisdom of Enlightenment will exist forever in the truth of the Dharma, and in the practice of the Dharma. He who sees merely my body does not truly see me. Only he who accepts my teaching truly sees me. After my death, the Dharma shall be your teacher. Follow the Dharma and you will be true to me.⁸

Buddhism spread at a rapid speed because of the simplicity of its teachings and the magnetic personality of its founder. The gospel was preached in Pāli, the language of the common people, rather than in Sanskrit. Efforts of the Buddhist *saṅgha* coupled with royal patronage under Ashoka, Kanishka and Harsha contributed to its phenomenal growth.

Buddhism penetrated into the Greek world long before the advent of Jesus Christ. Ashoka's edicts and inscriptions show that the

message of Sakyamuni was carried to Burma, Nepal, Ceylon, Egypt, Syria, Macedonia and many other countries. Some scholars have even argued that Christianity is an offshoot of Buddhism.

Buddhism exercised a reformatory influence on Hinduism. By breaking down social barriers and clearing the spiritual atmosphere of superstition and obscurantism, it did useful service to humanity as a whole. Its contribution to Hinduism includes image worship, the monastic system, vegetarianism and the theory of *ahimsā*. Buddhist writings on logic, epistemology, psychology and metaphysics have come to form an invaluable treasure of Indian literature. Buddhism has sometimes been described as a child of Hinduism, 'a daughter in many respects more beautiful than the mother'. Buddha is regarded as the ninth incarnation of Lord Vishnu and worshipped in temples.

The decline of the Buddhist *saṅgha*, the revival of brahminical Hinduism, the division of the Buddhist church into Hinayana and Mahayana, the loss of royal patronage, and the invasion of the Huns and Muslims struck a deadly blow to the religion of Buddha in the land of its birth. The legacy, however, continues to live and a Buddhist renaissance seems to be in the offing.

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Vitasta—The Sacred River of Kashmir

CHANDER M BHAT

The goddess who causes her devotees to live together for mutual benefit and guides them to the final beatitude of life is named Vitasta. She is worshipped as the goddess of benefaction.

—*Bhavani-nama-sahasra Stuti*

River Jhelum, commonly known as the Vitasta (further shortened to Vytha in Kashmiri), runs a length of 203 km and meanders through the Kashmir Valley in artistic zigzags. It is the most important river of the region and gives the valley the appellation Vaitastika. In fact, the Vitasta is the lifeline of the Kashmir Valley. Wonderful temples are situated on its banks, right from its origin at Vitasta Srot (Vethavorthur).

According to the *Nilmat Puran*, the Vitasta is an incarnation of Uma, who at the request of Kashyapa came bubbling forth as a river from a hole as big as a *vitasti* ('the span between the extended thumb and middle finger'), made by Shiva with his spear. Vitasta divides the valley into two equal parts. It originates from Vernag (Varanaga of the *Rajatarangini*), a big octagonal spring about 26 km from Anantnag. The spring flows into a small canal and from there begins the Vitasta River. The spring is situated at the bottom of a hill covered by pine tress, evergreen plants and chinars which even today border it in magnificient size.

Further to the east of the spring lie the remains of a pavilion and baths built during the Mughal period. The structures are of rare design. They were constructed by the Mughal emperor Jahangir and slabs for this purpose were brought all the way from Iraq. The date of construction, 1029 AH, is inscribed on a stone installed at the western gate of the spring. Emperor Jahangir loved the place so much that on the eve of his death he asked to

be brought here.

Kashmiris, especially the Pandits, are not only proud of the Vitasta but they virtually worship it as the manifestation of the goddess Uma. Vaitha Truvah, which falls on the thirteenth day of the lunar fortnight of Bhadon (Bhadra; August-September), used to be celebrated at Vernag, and on this occasion Kashmiri Pandits, coming from all parts of the valley, used to participate with great religious fervour and devotion. On this occasion, earthen lamps set afloat on the river bedecked with floating and flickering lights, presented a captivating and memorable spectacle. Vaitha Truvah, also known as Vaitha-Vatur-Truvah, literally means 'Vaitha for the Jhelum-source thirteenth day'. A mahayajna used to be performed on this occasion.

Vernag is also the birthplace of the mystic-saint Tapaswini Mathra Devi. Born in the noble family of Pandit Hari Kaul on Shravana Shukla Ashtami, Samvat 1935 (1878 CE), Mathra Devi, after practising her spiritual sadhana and tapasya along with her younger brother Pandit Gobind Kaul, blessed Vernag for another seventeen years after returning from Durga Nag, till she became one with the One above. There is also a Shiva temple with a seven-foot-long linga situated in the village of Voomoh, and it is said that it fascinatingly changes colour each day during the week.

After Vernag comes Dooru village. Dooru is the birthplace of the great Kashmiri poet Roosal Mir, who died at a young age of thirty-three years but left a big mark on Kashmiri literature. From Dooru, the Vitasta flows by the plain of Mahmudabad, a small village on its left bank. Mahmudabad is the birthplace of the great poet Mahmud Gami. A prolific writer in Kashmiri, Mahmud Gami's

metrical versions of such Persian romances as *Yusuf-Zulaikha*, *Laila-Majnu* and *Shirin-Khusro*, despite the borrowed themes, present him as a poet endowed with a fine descriptive and narrative capacity. He wrote a large number of ghazals also. Another poet, Maqbul Shah, also borrowed from Persian romances to compose his *Gulrez*, a narrative poem based on a love theme. He also wrote a satirical account of Kashmiri peasant life known as *Guristnama*.

From Mahmudabad the Vitasta flows through Lok Bhawan (Larkhi Pora). Here again the Vitasta showers her blessings on a village called Gosayeen Gond. This village has been a pilgrimage centre from ancient times and is situated on the Anantnag-Vernag road. An attractive ashrama is found here. This village was the abode of Swami Ashramji. Many saints and sages have meditated in this village and attained moksha. A siddha, a mystic and a man of high spiritual attainments, Pandit Keshav Nath Kaul, popularly known as Kish Bab, also shifted to this holy village from Khah Bazar, Anantnag, and practised spiritual disciplines. The Hera Bah festival is celebrated in Lok Bhawan.

From Lok Bhawan, the Vitasta flows through Daligram and then to Anantnag. At Anantnag the River Chandravati or Diti meets it. Diti, the mother of the Daityas, is stated to have assumed the form of this river, later called Arapath (or Harshapatha). Chandravati and Trikoti may be the names of the rivulets which meet the Vitasta not very far from its confluence with the Harshapatha. Chaturvedi, another tributary, joins the Vitasta after the latter's confluence with the Vishoka at Anantnag. Anantnag is an ancient town of Kashmir, about 65 km north of Srinagar. Anantnag literally means 'countless springs'. It has another name, Sheshnag; Sheshnag is the mythical serpent on whose hoods is seated Lord Vishnu along with his spouse Lakshmi. Environed by mountains, enriched with myriads of trees and plants laden with loads of fruits and flowers, and with so many rivulets,

this beautiful city offers breathtaking natural views all around. At one place two exquisite cascades can be seen gushing out of a mountain and falling into two different ponds. Nearby lies a beautiful garden house of the then Maharaja of Kashmir with a temple standing not far off. The city boasts many other water cascades, one of them being sulphurous. The famous Nagabal in the lap of a hillock, with some ancient temples, also forms a part of Anantnag. The annual festival of Ananta Devata is held on the fourteenth day of the dark half of Bhadra.

From Anantnag the Vitasta flows through Khannabal, a small town just outside the city. It is at Khannabal that three separate rivulets, the Arpat, the Bring and the Sadrine join it to swell its waters. Flowing with a gentle murmur, the Vitasta passes the ancient tirthas of Vijayeswar (Bijbehara) and Chakradhar (Chakdhar). Both these temples were destroyed by Sikandar Butshikan.

Bijbehara was an important seat of learning and in ancient times it had a university where students flocked to satiate their thirst for learning and scholarship. The dome of the Bijbehara temple was so high that it is said that its shadow fell up to Srinagar city.

After Bijbehara the river flows through Sangam at Awantipora. At Sangam it receives the united waters of the Vesau, the Lidder and the Rambyara. The ninth-century Kashmir ruler Avanti Varman, who ruled from 855-83 CE, founded Awantipora as his capital city. Here he built two temples, Avantiswar and Avantiswamin, consecrated to Shiva. The remains of these temples are still seen in this village, which is 28 km from Srinagar. Discoveries up till now are all due to the efforts of Jagadish Chandra Chatterjee, the great archaeologist, under whose directions the excavation work was completed at Awantipora in 1908. But more excavations here could bring to light the ruins of many other temples lying buried underneath. In fact, some coins belonging to the Hindu period were unearthed in the

area in 1914-16, under the supervision of Daya Ram Sahni. According to Henry Cole, the temple must have been constructed between 852-54 CE. According to the *Koshur Encyclopaedia* (though the book gives a rather distorted picture of ancient Kashmir), the temple of Avantiswamin is a Vishnu temple.

About five kilometres downstream, near the present Kakapora, the waters of the freshet Roomesh mingle with the Vitasta. At Kakapora also there are ruins of some ancient temples, and it is generally believed that King Avanti Varman, who was a patron of art and architecture, built the temples. The river then passes through Pampore (erstwhile Padmann-pora), the land of Lal Ded and saffron. Five kilometres from here lies the temple of Rudresha at Ludov village. This temple bears the stamp of the Gandhara style in Hindu architecture and closely resembles the vihara at Buniyar in Swat valley. The legendary poet-saint Lal Ded was born in Pampore. Her verses taught monism and religious tolerance. Translated into various languages because of its universal message, Lal Ded's poetry transcends the boundaries of Kashmir.

After touching the holy land of Pampore, the Vitasta proceeds towards another village known as Pandrethan (Puranadishthana). In ancient times this place, situated at a distance of five kilometres to the south of Srinagar, was the capital of Kashmir. The *Rajatarangini* mentions that in 50 BCE two temples of Shiva, called Bhima Swamin and Vardhamanesha were built here. This undoubtedly testifies to the antiquity of the town. A Shiva temple in this ancient town is the only historical relic that has survived the ravages of the past. The stones of the temple are simply placed side by side without the use of mortar. The temple was built sometime during 913-21 CE by Partha, the then king of Kashmir, and its ruling deity Shiva was called Meru Vardhana Swami, after the king's chief minister. The capital stood on the left bank of the Vitasta at the beginning of the reign of King Pravarasena

II, who later shifted it to the south of the river. Swami Vivekananda on his second visit to Kashmir visited this temple on 19 July 1898 and Sister Nivedita describes it in the following words:

The temple consisted of a small cell with four doorways opening to the cardinal points. Externally it was a tapering pyramid—with its top truncated, to give foot-hold to a bush—supported on a four-pierced pedestal. In its architecture, trefoil and triangular arches were combined in an unusual fashion with each other and with the straight-lined lintel. It was built with marvellous solidity, and the necessary lines were somewhat obscured by heavy ornament. ...

In the centre of the ceiling was a large sun-medallion, set in a square whose points were the points of the compass. This left four equal triangles at the corners of the ceiling, which were filled with sculpture in low relief, male and female figures intertwined with serpents, beautifully done. On the wall were empty spaces, where seemed to have been a band of topes.

Outside, carvings were similarly distributed. In one of the trefoil arches—over, I think, the eastern door—was a fine image of the Teaching Buddha, standing, with his hand uplifted. Running round the buttresses was a much-defaced frieze of a seated woman with a tree—evidently Maya Devi, the mother of Buddha.

The masonry of this little temple was superb and probably accounted for its long preservation. A single block of stone would be so cut as to correspond not to one brick in a wall, but to a section of the architect's plan.¹

Habba Khatoon, a great poetess reputed for her refined feminine sensibilities, and who rose to be the queen of Kashmir after her marriage with King Yusuf Khan Chak, also belonged to Pandrethan.

After Pandrethan the Vitasta enters the land of Srinagar. According to Kalhana it was Emperor Ashoka who in 300 BCE built the city of Srinagar, which later on came to be the country's capital during the reign of King Abhimanyu, who assumed power in 960 CE. The Srinagar of Ashoka stood on the eastern

part of the present city. King Pravarasena II founded the new capital Pravarpur near Hari Parvat. He built the first bridge of boats across the Vitasta and also many temples and palaces. In the sixth century CE, King Gopaditya had his capital in Gopakar, a name which derives from Gopadiriha. Srinagar is the prime city of Kashmir, described by poets as heaven on earth. At present there are seven bridges in all across the Vitasta River within Srinagar city. The names of the seven bridges may be cited seriatim: Amira Kadal, Habba Kadal, Fateh Kadal, Zaina Kadal, Ali Kadal, Nawa Kadal, and Saffa Kadal. On the eastern side of the city is a conspicuous mountain called Shankaracharya Hill. There is an ancient temple of Lord Shiva on the top of this mountain, built in the sixth century CE by King Gopaditya. It commands a magnificent panoramic view of Srinagar city.

Sumeri Mavas used to be celebrated in Srinagar, and it was a custom to take bath on this day at the Soomyar temple ghat, which was recently burnt to ashes by militants. There are many other temples on the banks of the Vitasta in Srinagar city, like Barov Mandir, Hanuman Mandir, Ganpatyar Mandir, Kharyar Mandir, Bhagawan Gopinathji Ashrama (in Kharyar), Soomyar Mandir, Drabyar Mandir, Raghunath Mandir and Kali Mandir, to name a few. Unfortunately most of them have been desecrated.

Just before reaching Srinagar the Vitasta is joined by the Mahuri. After covering over five kilometres within the city, the river first flows north and then turning south-west receives the river Dugdhaganga, the source of which is in Mount Tutakoti. At Srinagar the Vitasta flows calmly even when it is full to the brim. In the olden days there was an octroi post in the city near Chattabal called Abi Guzar. Octroi was collected here, as the Vitasta was the only means of transport. Swami Vivekananda, accompanied by a party of westerners on his second visit to Kashmir via Rawalpindi, also preferred this means of

transport; and from Baramulla to Srinagar he hired three dungas (houseboats) to reach Srinagar. It took the party three days to reach Srinagar, from 20 to 22 June 1898.²

The present confluence of the Vitasta with the Sindhu takes place at Sharadapur, whose name was later changed to Shadipur. Mortal remains of the deceased used to be immersed in the Vitasta near Sharadapur. Sharadapur was also known as Paritranapura in the days of yore. It was the capital of King Lalitaditya in the eighth century. Later King Shankara Varman shifted the capital to Pattan. At Sharadapur one finds high mountain peaks clad in snow dazzling in the sunlight, while birds of myriad varieties fly overhead. The chinars with their leaves of various hues seem to emit a wonderful light. Sharadapur is called the Hardwar of Kashmir.

After passing through the villages of Uchakundal and Marakundal, the river Vitatsta enters the outskirts of Vaskur village. Rup Bhawani is said to have lived at Vaskur for about twenty-five years in a small hut. Here she had a well dug by a blind potter, whose eyesight was miraculously restored as soon as water appeared in the well. Considered auspicious for all purposes, even today the water of this well is used by all villagers irrespective of caste and creed. The hut and the well are being maintained by the Pandits of this village called Mattoos. Every year a festival is held here on Sahib Saptami, the seventh day of the dark fortnight of Magha.

The Vitasta then passes through village Sumbal. There is an *asthapan* of Nandikeswar, one of the brothers of the Asht Barov ('the Eight Bhairavas'). The Asht Barov and the places of their residence are: Sri Jagannath (Village Achan), Sri Nandikeswar (Village Sumbal), Sri Ganganand (Village Mattan), Sri Kakvishal (Village Pargachu), Sri Jivannath (Village Ladhoo), Sri Mangaleswar (Village Sirnoo), Sri Omkarnath (Village Drussu), and Sri Nilkanth (Village Murran).

It was the custom in every village of the

Kashmir Valley to offer a *razakath* (goat sacrifice) whenever a wish made by any villager got fulfilled. At Sumbal there used to be an offering of *razakath* when a new bride entered the village. Muslims also would partake of the prasad after *razakath*, and they would often shout outside the temple, 'Ya nandraza, khaew katha maaza! O Nandraja, feed us the prasad!'

From Sumbal the Vitasta flows through Hajan village into Wular Lake and then on to Sopore, the apple town. At Sopore also there is a famous temple of Shiva known as Nandikeswar Bhairav, situated on the left bank of the river, where an annual festival is held on Jyeshtha Amavasya. There are also the temples of Reshi Pir and Devibal, and another Shiva temple on the bank of the Vitasta. It is said that Reshi Pir was born in Sopore in a shikara when his mother was returning from her paternal home in Gund Gushi. A beautiful temple was built near the spot and all the Pandits living in the surrounding villages used to go there to get the blessings of Reshi Pir.

About six kilometres below Sopore the Vitasta receives the stream Pohur, and after flowing over twenty-two kilometres further it reaches the gorge of Baramulla. Like Srinagar city Baramulla (Varahamula) town is also bisected by the river. Here in Baramulla there are many holy spots on either side of the

Vitasta. Shailaputri (Devibal) is on the left bank. Shailaputri is considered a miniature of Khir Bhawani. There is a freshwater spring within the temple premises. On the right bank of the river is Koti Tirth. It is believed that the holy waters of one crore *tirthas* reach here through the Vitasta and is therefore considered very sacred. There is a Shiva temple adjacent to Koti Tirth and the shivalinga is of a unique type, depicting the full face of Shiva.

From Baramulla to Kohala, the Vitasta flows very fast, and near Domel, the Krishnaganga also joins it. Famous for its cold water, the Krishnaganga (also called Neelam) originates from Drass and after passing through the mountains and tracts of Tilal, Guraz, Keran and Karnah flows into the Vitasta. The Vitasta itself takes a sharp southern turn near Muzaffarabad as it rushes to join the Chenab on its way to the Sindhu (Indus) in Pakistan.

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Rivers of the Rig Veda

इमं मे गङ्गे यमुने सरस्वति शुतुद्रि स्तोमं सच्चात् परुष्ण्या । असिक्न्या मरुद्धृये वितस्त्याऽर्जीकीये शृणुह्या सुषोमया ॥
तृष्ट्यामया प्रथमं यातवे सजूः सुसर्त्वा रसया श्वेत्या त्व्या । त्वं सिन्ध्यो कुभया गोमतीं क्रुमुं मेहत्न्वा सरथं याभिरीयसे ॥

O Ganga, Yamuna, Saraswati, Shutudri (Sutlej) and Parushni (Ravi), accept this my praise! Listen, O Marudvridha with Asikni (Chenab), and Vitasta (Jhelum)! (Listen,) O Arjikiya (Beas) with Sushoma (Indus)! You, Sindhu, on this journey, have united yourself first with Trishtama, with the Susartu, the Rasa, and the Shweti; you have united the Gomati (Gomal) and the Krumu (Kurum) with the Kubha (Kabul) and the Mehatnu, in conjunction with which streams you ride your chariot.

—Rig Veda, 10.75.5-6

He (the poet) takes in at one swoop three great river systems ... I call a man, who for the first time could see those three marching armies of rivers, a poet.

—Max Muller, *India, What It Can Teach Us*

Parabrahma Upaniṣad

TRANSLATED BY SWAMI ATMAPRIYANANDA

Duties of a seeker of liberation (*continued*)

सूत्रमन्तर्गतं येषां ज्ञानयज्ञोपवीतिनाम् ।
ते तु सूत्रविदो लोके ते च यज्ञोपवीतिनः ॥११॥

11. Those wearers of the sacred thread (*yajñopavita*) of Knowledge (*jñāna*), in whom the *sūtra* has been interiorized, are verily the knowers of [the inner spiritual meaning of] the *sūtra* [sacred thread] in this world, and they [alone are the true] wearers of the sacred thread.

ज्ञानशिखिनो ज्ञानिष्ठा ज्ञानयज्ञोपवीतिनः ।
ज्ञानमेव परं तेषां पवित्रं ज्ञानमीरितम् ॥१२॥

12. Those for whom Knowledge (*jñāna*) is the tuft of hair, [who are one-pointedly] devoted to Knowledge, [who wear] the *yajñasūtra* (or *yajñopavita*) of Knowledge—for them, Knowledge alone is the Supreme, [and this] Knowledge is spoken of as [supremely sanctifying, or] purifying.¹

अग्रेत्रिव शिखा नान्या यस्य ज्ञानमयी शिखा ।
स शिखीत्युच्यते विद्वान्नेतरे केशधारिणः ॥१३॥

13. The wise one whose [inner] tuft of hair consists of nothing other than Knowledge (*jñāna*),² like the flame [emanating] from fire, is said to be possessed of the true [tuft]; others [who are without Knowledge, merely] wear [a mass of] hair [on the head].

कर्मण्यधिकृता ये तु वैदिके लौकिकेऽपि वा ।
ब्राह्मणाभासमात्रेण जीवन्ते कुक्षिपूरकाः ।
व्रजन्ते निरयं ते तु जन्म जन्मनि जन्मनि ॥१४॥

14. Those [*brāhmaṇas*] who are [merely] engaged in activities, [either] Vedic rituals (and ceremonies) or worldly actions, live as *brāhmaṇas* only in [external] appearance (with the mere semblance of *brāhmaṇa*-hood) [only to] fill up their bellies. They indeed go through hellish experiences birth after birth.

वामांसदक्षकट्टयन्तं ब्रह्मसूत्रं तु सव्यतः ।
अन्तर्गतप्रमारुढं तत्त्वतन्तु समन्वितम् ।
नाभ्यादिब्रह्मरन्धान्तं प्रमाणं धारयेत्सुधीः ॥१५॥

15. The [external] sacred thread (*brahmaśūtra*) [merely] hanging from the left shoulder to the right hip is contrary [to liberation].³ A righteous person endowed with awakened higher intelligence⁴ should wear [the inner *sūtra* of] true Knowledge resting (or rooted) in inward certitude of true awareness, composed of threads in the form of spiritual principles (*tattvas*) and extending from the navel to the *brahmarandhra* (the aperture in the crown of the head).⁵

तेभिर्धर्यमिदं सूत्रं क्रियाङ्गं तन्तुनिर्मितम् ।
शिखा ज्ञानमयी यस्य उपवीतं च तन्मयम् ।
ब्राह्मण्यं सकलं तस्य नेतरेषां तु किंचन ॥१६॥

16. This sacred thread which forms part of ritualistic observances and is made up of [cotton] threads should be worn by them (that is, by the unawakened or ignorant *brāhmaṇas*). He whose tuft of hair consists of [spiritual] Knowledge and whose sacred thread is also [likewise] of the nature of that [wisdom] [alone possesses] all the [true] characteristics of a *brāhmaṇa*; but none of this [will be applicable or relevant] in the case of others [the ignorant or unawakened ones who claim to be *brāhmaṇas* merely in name].

इदं यज्ञोपवीतं तु परमं यत्परायणम् ।
विद्वान्यज्ञोपवीती संघारयेद्यः स मुक्तिभाक् ॥१७॥

17. Verily this *yajñopavita* (sacred thread in the form of true Knowledge) is the supreme which leads to the highest Abode. The wise person who rightly wears [such a] sacred thread attains liberation.

बहिरन्तश्चोपवीती विप्रः संन्यस्तुमर्हति ।
एकयज्ञोपवीती तु नैव संन्यस्तुमर्हति ॥१८॥

18. The *brāhmaṇa* (*vipra*) endowed with the external as well as the internal sacred thread [described above] is entitled to renunciation (*sannyāsa*), but he who has [only] one sacrificial thread [that is, the external one alone] is never entitled to *sannyāsa*.⁶

तस्मात्सर्वप्रथलेन मोक्षापेक्षी भवेद्यतिः ।
बहिःसूत्रं परित्यज्य स्वान्तःसूत्रं तु धारयेत् ॥१९॥

19. The ascetic monk should, therefore, by an all-out effort, strive [relentlessly] and long for liberation.⁷ [For this, however,] he shall wear within himself the internal *sūtra*, after completely discarding the external thread.

बहिष्पञ्चशिखोपवीतित्वमनादृत्य प्रणवहंसशिखोपवीतित्वमवलम्ब्य मोक्षसाधनं कुर्यादित्याह भगवान्त्तौनकः ।
इत्युपनिषत् ॥२०॥

20. Disregarding the external world of phenomena, the external tuft of hair and the external thread, [the earnest seeker of liberation] should engage himself in the spiritual striving for [ultimate] freedom (*mokṣa*) by holding on to *pranava* (the sacred syllable *Om*) and *harīṣa*⁸ [respectively] as the essence [and the true meaning of] the tuft and sacred thread. Thus declared (that is, taught) Bhagavān Śaunaka. Thus (ends) the Upaniṣad.

Notes

1. Cf. Bhagavadgītā, 4.38: 'Verily, there is nothing in this world as purifying as Knowledge.'
2. Like a flame of fire always burning bright, the spiritual knowledge remains irradiating the heart and soul of a person.
3. On account of its being a mere mechanical symbol.
4. The higher intelligence is indicated by the Sanskrit word *dhi*. A person endowed with righteousness, in whom this *dhi* has been awakened, is called *sudhiḥ*.

5. The *brahmaṇḍhra* is located at the top of the head in the form of a small aperture (cf. *Taittiriya Upaniṣad*, 1.13, wherein this is referred to as *vyapohya sīrṣa kapāle*) and is considered to be the place of termination in the body of the *suṣumṇā nādi*, extending vertically upward (cf. *Kaṭhopaniṣad*, 2.3.16). The *prāṇa* of a spiritually evolved soul who has been devoted to *karma* and *upāsanā* moves upwards at the time of death through this *nādi*, leaves the body piercing through the *brahmaṇḍhra*, and takes him to *brahma-loka*, eventually leading him to what is called *krama mukti* (gradual liberation). He who is liberated-in-life (called a *jivanmukta*), however, does not experience any arousal or upward movement of the *prāṇa* at all at the time of death, for he verily attains Brahman, being Brahman alone ('*Nātasya prāṇā utkrāmanti brahmaiva san brahmāpyeti*' —*Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad*, 4.4.6). All the desires (*vāsanās*) in his case are obliterated through irrevocable merger into the Self here and now, that is, while living in the body ('*Ihaiva sarve pravilīyanti kāmāḥ*' —*Muṇḍaka Upaniṣad*, 3.2.2).

6. The idea is that a spiritual aspirant eager for *sannyāsa* must sincerely strive to internalize the external symbols of spiritual life, by leading a completely inward, contemplative life in the inner world of the Spirit, after taking to the path of *sannyāsa* (see *mantra* 20).

7. As already mentioned (see endnote 1 of previous instalment) this earnest longing for liberation is perhaps the most important criterion for achieving the summum bonum of spiritual life. Hence the Upaniṣad ends its teaching with a fervent appeal to cultivate the earnestness leading to profound yearning or longing for supreme Freedom. As Swami Vivekananda said, "'Freedom, O Freedom! Freedom, O Freedom!' is the song of the soul.' This *mantra* gives, as it were, the summary and the essence of the Upaniṣadic teaching.

8. Ultimately identifying the tuft of hair on the head with the sacred syllable *Om* and the sacred thread (*sūtra*) with *haṁsa*, indicates Advaita *sādhanā*—through the practice of contemplation with statements such as '*Oṁ so'ham'* (*Om*, I am He) and '*haṁsa*' (the Supreme Spirit as identical with the individual Spirit).

Brahmanuchintanam – Meditation on Brahman

अहमेव परं ब्रह्म निश्चितं चित्तं चिन्त्यताम् ।
चिद्रूपत्वादसङ्गत्वादबाध्यत्वात्प्रयत्नतः ॥

O mind, with great effort and certitude think: 'I am verily Brahman', for (you are) of the nature of Consciousness, untouched and unfettered.

ब्रह्मैवाहं न संसारी मुक्तोऽहमिति भावयेत् ।
अशक्तुवन्भावयितुं वाक्यमेतत्सदाऽभ्यसेत् ॥

One must think: 'I am Brahman alone, not a worldly being—and free.' If that is not possible, this statement should constantly be repeated.

यदभ्यासेन तद्दावो भवेद्द्वमरकीटवत् ।
अत्रापहाय सदैहमभ्यसेत्कृतनिश्चयः ॥

Like the insect (that became) the bee, what one thinks that one becomes. So, giving up doubt, one must resolutely repeat (this statement).

—Shankaracharya

Swami Kalyandev: A Lamp that Swamiji Lighted

SWAMI VIDEHATMANANDA

A free translation by Swami Satyamayananda, from 'News and Reports' (January 2005) of Vivek Jyoti, the Hindi journal of the Ramakrishna Order, published from Raipur, Chattisgarh.

Swami Vivekananda said: 'The national ideals of India are RENUNCIATION and SERVICE. Intensify her in those channels, and the rest will take care of itself. The banner of the spiritual cannot be raised too high in this country. In it alone is salvation.'¹ A sannyasin who embodied these words of Swamiji's recently entered into mahasamadhi. He was the last surviving person who had seen and talked to Swami Vivekananda. One is amazed to learn how he translated into action Swamiji's message to him and transformed himself into a nationally renowned saint. He performed not ordinary miracles but the real miracle of bringing solace and succour to numerous poor and downtrodden people. Last year, on 14 July, the 129-year-old sannyasin passed away into eternal samadhi, after 'witnessing three centuries'.

Swami Kalyandev was born Kaluram on 21 June 1876 in Kotana village in the district of Baghpat, Uttar Pradesh, at his maternal grandfather's home. He was the third son of his pious parents, who hailed from the village of Mundbhar in Muzaffarnagar district. His father was Pherudatt and mother, Bhoi Devi. Kaluram spent his early years in Mundbhar.

In his childhood Kaluram got an opportunity to visit his paternal aunt's home in Budhana. His uncle Bulla Bhagat was a zamindar there. There was no dearth of anything at home but Bulla Bhagat and his wife were distressed because they were childless. This was probably the reason the devout couple had the child Kaluram brought to fill the void. Religion is the backbone of rural India, and Bulla Bhagat's home was no different;

rather it was intensely religious. The couple immersed themselves in devotion to God and service of holy men. Kaluram's uncle became so well known among the wandering sadhus that they always thronged his doors. Unfailingly, every morning and evening there used to be readings from the Ramayana, after which prasad used to be distributed joyously to all present.

Kaluram was happy growing in this ambience. He used to rise early and after ablutions sit beside his uncle to attentively listen to the Ramayana being sung. Thus from childhood the stories and teachings of the Ramayana entered deep into Kaluram's heart and left a permanent impress. These ennobling ideas and images then became his ideal. Seeing so many sadhus every day and noticing their spirit of freedom, which impressed him, young Kaluram one day left his uncle's home like the itinerant mendicants to strive for God-realization. He wore only a loincloth and a cotton chadar.

Empty-handed and barefoot, begging for food and asking the way, the lad reached Ayodhya, the place of his dreams and aspirations. Here he met Swami Ramdas, who tutored him in the alphabet. Kaluram was a bright student and soon he could read the Ramayana in Hindi. In Ayodhya he heard of a holy place of pilgrimage, Hardwar. His mind now became restless to visit it, and after spending some more days in Ayodhya, Kaluram left for Hardwar. In Hardwar, he was delighted to see the numerous temples and ashramas. He never settled in one ashrama but kept moving on to different ones. Day and

night he listened to the holy scriptures and devotional songs. It was during one of these days that he went to Khetri, where he met Swami Vivekananda and was instructed by him.

After returning from Khetri, there arose a strong desire in his mind to get formally initiated by a guru. In his search for an ideal guru, Kaluram reached Muni-ki-Reti in Rishikesh, the abode of ascetics, and met Swami Purnananda. The pure and simple Swami Purnananda agreed to Kaluram's earnest prayers and accepted him as a disciple. Observing Kaluram's devotion to service, his guru initiated him into sannyasa in 1900 and gave him the name Swami Kalyandev. At his guru's behest Kalyandev stayed in the Himalayan regions and performed intense tapasya for a few years. But there was something that was tugging at his heart. He descended from the mountains and soon engaged himself in various kinds of altruistic works. Now his yearning soul was calmed down. In time, Kalyandev's work grew into a seva-yajna, service as a religious sacrifice. And throughout the remainder of his long life of more than one hundred years, this seva-yajna grew in intensity.

Meeting Swami Vivekananda was the greatest turning point in Swami Kalyandev's life. In November 1897, Swamiji had reached Dehra Dun. From there he proceeded to Delhi, Alwar and then to Jaipur, where he put up at Khetri House. On 9 December, Swamiji, accompanied by some of his gurubhais and disciples, left for Khetri in horse carriages and reached the place on the 12th. Swamiji being a state guest, arrangements were made by Maharaja Ajit Singh for his stay at Sukh Mahal. In this garden house Swamiji stayed for three weeks with his entourage.

Probably, Swami Kalyandev first heard of Swamiji when he was about twenty-one years old. He was still Kaluram then and was residing in Hardwar. Swamiji's triumph at the Parliament of Religions in Chicago in 1893 and his subsequent successful preaching of Hinduism had generated awe, veneration and

gratitude in India. When Kaluram heard that the world-renowned Swami Vivekananda was going to Khetri via Dehra Dun, Delhi, Alwar and Jaipur, he decided to meet him. Doggedly, he started for Jaipur on foot. On reaching there he heard that Swamiji had left for Khetri, and that on his return journey he would take a different route to Calcutta via Jodhpur and Ajmer. In those days, reaching Khetri was extremely difficult, but young Kaluram was no weakling and as was his habit, he again travelled on foot. He met Swamiji in one of the garden houses in Khetri.

A reporter of *Amar Ujala*, a popular Hindi daily, while interviewing Swami Kalyandev for the paper's 14 October 2003 issue, enquired, 'Where did you get the inspiration to go from village to village and do social service?' The swami replied, 'In 1893 I met Swami Vivekananda in Khetri.² He said to me, "If you want to see God, go to the huts of the poor. And if you want to attain God, then serve the poor, the helpless, the downtrodden and the miserable." To attain God through service of the poor is the mantra I received from Swamiji. I have never been able to forget it.'³

According to another version, during Kaluram's meeting with Swamiji he was told that 'The vision of God can be had in the huts of the poor. The farmer and the labourer—these are God's two children. When you wake up in the morning and come out of your house, you will hear two sounds: the bells ringing in the temples and the cries of the suffering, "Oh, Rama! I am dying!" Follow the second sound first and try to alleviate people's suffering according to your capacity. You may go to the temple only then.'⁴

Swamiji's remarkable personality and his instructions left an indelible impression on young Kaluram. As we have already seen, it was after this meeting that Kaluram found his guru and had sannyasa. Then, for the rest of his life, he went from village to village on foot and served farmers and labourers, the poor and the downtrodden.

With unflagging effort stretching over a century, Swami Kalyandev established about three hundred institutions for spreading education and bringing humanitarian aid to villages, especially what was beneficial to people at grass-roots level. His work covered western Uttar Pradesh, Haryana, Punjab, Rajasthan, Delhi and other places. The institutions include technical and vocational schools, an ayurvedic medical college, middle schools, high schools, girls' schools, junior high schools, primary schools, clinics and dispensaries, eye clinics, Sanskrit schools, workshops, students' homes, dharmashalas, schools for the deaf and dumb, blind schools, yoga instruction centres, old age homes, asylums for old cows, orphanages, martyrs' memorials, and other religious and spiritual centres. In all these institutions distinctions of caste or sex have never been a bar. Poor or rich, all receive equal treatment.

All of Swami Kalyandev's endeavours show that he tried to raise social consciousness by bringing in modern ideas. He worked against untouchability, alcoholism, child marriage and such other social evils. But in spite of being the initiator of so many institutions, Swami Kalyandev himself never held an official post.

Swami Kalyandev also helped rebuild dilapidated and neglected religious and historical sites. For example, he renovated a monument in Shuktal, sixty kilometres north of Meerut, associated with the great sage Shuka, the son of Veda Vyasa and the narrator of the Bhagavata. There the swami also established the Shukadeva Ashrama and Seva Samiti. He also renovated parts of Hastinapur, the old capital of the Pandavas and Kauravas. Many places of pilgrimage in Haryana too have received his attention. In works of this kind, the swami displayed uncommon concern for the safety of pilgrims.

Even at 128 Swami Kalyandev kept himself engaged in the service of the poor, looking upon them as manifestations of Narayana. He

was fearless; disease and sorrow meant nothing to him. He was simple and innocent. From early morning till late in the night people of all types used to flock to him and he would listen to each of them attentively and patiently and give proper advice. Thus he tried to remove their wants and help them out of their problems.

Swami Kalyandev met Mahatma Gandhiji in 1915. He was acquainted with luminaries like Pandit Madan Mohan Malaviya, Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru and Dr Sampurnanand. In 1982 he received the Padma Sri award, and in 2000 the prestigious Padma Bhushan. He was also awarded an honorary D.Litt. by Meerut University. In 2002 Sri Atal Behari Vajpayee, the then prime minister of India, released in his presence the momentous volume *The Seer of Three Centuries: Swami Kalyan Dev*, compiled in his honour.⁵

Swami Vivekananda had said: 'You have heard that Christ said, "My words are spirit and they are life." So are my words spirit and life; they will burn their way into your brain and you will never get away from them!'⁶ We see the demonstration of this truth in the life of Swami Kalyandev. It was a great life of renunciation and service. It has set a towering example for us to emulate. ~

Notes and References

1. *The Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda*, 9 vols. (Calcutta: Advaita Ashrama, 1-8, 1989; 9, 1997), 5.228.
2. Although Swami Kalyandev said that he met Swamiji in 1893, the chronology of events suggests that the meeting took place in 1897.
3. It was Sri Suresh Kumar Srivastav of Gursarai, Jhansi, who first made this clipping available to the author.
4. *Shuktirth Sandesh* (Hindi), July-September 2004, 3. This source was made available to the author through the kindness of Dr Sudhir Kumar Bharadwaj of Muzaffarnagar.
5. *Godhan* (Delhi), January 2003.
6. CW, 9.407.



Reviews



*For review in PRABUDDHA BHARATA
publishers need to send two copies of their latest publications.*

Radical Optimism: Practical Spirituality in an Uncertain World. Beatrice Bruteau. Sentient Publications, 1113 Spruce Street, Boulder, Colorado 80302, USA. E-mail: cshaw@sentientpublications.com. 2002. 139 pp. \$13.95.

Each moment of crisis in mankind's history has seen a great spurt in religious thinking and spiritual discourse. Nearer our own times, we saw how E V Ramaswami Naicker's anti-God movement enjoyed burning Kamban's Ramayana in public places and breaking up the idols of Ganesha in Tamil Nadu, leading to a spurt in the formation of Kamban societies for propagating the Tamil epic, and establishment of Vinayaka temples all over the state. Immediately after the World Trade Center was destroyed more than three years ago, one saw an increased attendance in temples and churches. Obviously we need God, and we need friends like Beatrice Bruteau to speak of God in simple terms wrapped up in lovely productions such as *Radical Optimism*.

As for Ms Bruteau, is she merely juggling with a new phrase in 'radical optimism'? Well, she arrests our attention with the phrase. This is important in a world sold over to the glitterati. Having made us stop for a moment, she hurries to us with an uncomplicated argument, drawing her breath from the Bible and other religious writings from the East and the West.

Piercing through our ego that swirls with thoughts of the past, the present and the future, we should reach the Self at the bottom of our mind. This comes by tuning ourselves to contemplation, making it our second nature. Ms Bruteau's strategy, culled from traditional approaches, is viable. One must practise meditation with prayerful patience as there is no 'crash course' for the subject. A beginning can come from giving credence to myths, for they are our bridges to reach the Infinite:

The Hindus say we should first listen, then we should think, and then we should realize. Receiving the myths is listening; doing metaphys-

ics is thinking; living as mystics is realizing.

Receiving and assimilating myth—whether stylized traditional myths or the mythic dimensions of our own lives—is itself an unconscious experience of the union of the finite and the Infinite. For the mythic embodies the presence of the Infinite, the undefined, the unspeakable, in the artistic guise of the finite, the defined, the variously spoken. (56)

How about the presence of evil in this world? 'Sin originates in lack of sufficient believable unconditional love,' says the author. By believing in God's love (which is called grace as it is unconditional), by loving the other as ourselves, we can transform the other. This is quite often misunderstood, but it is an occupational hazard which we should not bother about. Ms Bruteau then says:

It was from the nineteenth-century Hindu saint Sri Ramakrishna that I learned to approach the spiritual life from the point of view of conceiving God as both with form and without form. This allows both a dualistic devotion and a non-dualistic realization of God as valid. What was special about Sri Ramakrishna was his ability to enter deeply into various religious traditions of the world, ones he found in his own native India and other religious traditions that he knew about. He declared he found them all valid. (89)

It is interesting to know that Jesus, who is the goal of the devotees, called himself the *hidos* ('the way'), so close to the Srivaishnava concept of Narayana being the Way and the Goal. The logical structuring of the mystic Trinitarian Community by Ms Bruteau has a close parallel in the *tonda-k-kulam* hailed by Perialwar. Ultimately, it is love of God that binds the devotees into a community (*kulam*). Where there is such love, there would be no urge for selfish exploitation either. This would ornament us with 'the ecological virtue':

Instead of trying to exploit the rest of the world to our personal, group, or even species advantage, we can cooperate with all beings so that all live, all benefit. This is the *ecological virtue*.

While the Buddhists, Jains and the American Indians, among others, have understood and practised it, it may be something new on the moral horizon of many of us. We were brought up to believe that the rest of the world was created for our use and that the other creatures have no rights to life of their own. But the ecological sense should be an instinct in the contemplative, who should not have to stop and make a deliberate effort to conserve the environment or respect the rights of others. (126)

Ms Bruteau has read well and read deeply. She has sought to question herself and gathered a few relevant answers with the becoming humility of a seeker. 'Contemplation can't, in the end, be talked about. It has to be practised. There are people who have practised and who have seen and who have manifested.' We can certainly make a beginning with the cover of *Radical Optimism*. Smile like that yellow blossom on the cover looking up at the sun! The answering grace is never far away from the aspiring heart!

Dr Prema Nandakumar
Researcher and Literary Critic
Srirangam

True Service of God. *Makarand Dave; trans. Rekha Gupta.* Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan, Kulapati Munshi Marg, Mumbai 400 007. E-mail: brbhavan@bom7.vsnl.net.in. 2003. viii + 58 pp. Rs 35.

The book contains seventeen inspiring short stories from various continents and cultures. These stories instil true and pure religious ideas, like piety, simplicity, charity, and dependence on God, in the readers' heart. All of them point to a practical religion and emphasize the value of self-surrender, service to the poor as God, generosity, equanimity, and seeing God everywhere. Makarand Dave, an eminent literary and saintly figure of Gujarat, has written these stories originally in Gujarati; and in this book Rekha Gupta has translated them into simple and effective English.

Over the centuries, religious and spiritual movements have produced many great saints and prophets. Around their lives are centred many great virtues which have established ethics, morality, and love for God in society as well as at an individual level. In this volume there are stories of saints from almost all major religions, including Ju-

diasm, Christianity, Islam, and Hinduism. These saints have all contributed towards social uplift of the poor and the masses. Their compassion is always worth remembering. We see such compassion when father Abraham beseeches God not to destroy the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah even if there were just ten good people around amongst the evil majority. (Story no. 16: 'The World Is My Neighbour')

The story of St Francis of Assisi (story no. 16) presents the events of his early life and his transformation into a saint as he turns to God in all earnestness. Story no. 17, 'Tears of Fire', is related to the life of Swami Vivekananda, who while in his wandering days in Rajasthan once abhors the idea of sitting through a royal *mehfil*, or naught programme, of a woman of 'low repute'. Then the lady sings a bhajan wherein she describes how a true saint should be equanimous and above the distinctions of good and evil. How the Swami later felt sad and got himself corrected for having discriminated between the lowly and the high is an inspiring narrative well known to many Indians.

Packing a lot of inspiration within its brief compass, the book should be especially useful for students and the youth.

Dr C S Shah (late)
Aurangabad

Books Received

Aura of Light. comp. *G C Agarwal.* G C Agarwal, 11A/1 Sunny Park, Kolkata 700 019. E-mail: gc@uniqueinternational.com. 372 pp. Rs 300.

'An exposition and elucidation of some of the basic thoughts of India' with an aim 'to show their relevance and practicality to the personal and social life of the day'. Topics as diverse as spiritualism, freedom, democracy, politics, education, secularism, and reservation have been covered.

The Five Elements. *K Hanumanthu.* K Hanumanthu, 20-3-5B Sivajyothi Nagar, Tirupati 517 507. 2003. v + 108 pp. Rs 45.

A study of the five primary elements from the Vedic, Puranic, and modern scientific viewpoints.

Reports

News from Belur Math

The 169th birth anniversary of Sri Ramakrishna was celebrated at Belur Math on 12 March 2005. Cooked prasad was served to about 24,000 devotees. Swami Mumukshunanda presided over the public meeting held in the afternoon. The public celebration held on 20 March drew more than 1,00,000 visitors, who thronged the premises throughout the day.

News from Branch Centres

As a part of its celebration of Holy Mother Sri Sarada Devi's 150th birth anniversary, **Ramakrishna Math, Baghbazar**, renovated the nearby 'Mayer Ghat' on the bank of the Ganga, where Holy Mother used to take bath during her stay at Udbodhan. It was inaugurated by Srimat Swami Atmasthanandaji Maharaj, Vice President, Ramakrishna Math and Ramakrishna Mission, on 1 February 2005 (Swami Vivekananda's birthday). He also unveiled a newly installed relief of Holy Mother on the ghat. Sri Subrato Mukherjee, Mayor of Kolkata, declared open the new gate at the entrance of the ghat.

Ramakrishna Math, Chennai, had launched a project named 'Viveka Murasu Village Awareness Programme' in August 2004, with the intention of carrying the message of Sri Ramakrishna, Sri Sarada Devi and Swami Vivekananda to the interior villages of Tamil Nadu by organizing bookstalls, exhibitions and satsangs with the help of audio-visual aids. Response to this programme has been overwhelming. During the last six months, the programme reached 38,768 students of 102 educational institutions as well as 17,625 persons in 133 villages and towns spread over 12 districts of the state.

Ramakrishna Math and Ramakrishna Mission Sevashrama, Allahabad, organized

a medical camp and an exhibition on Sri Ramakrishna, Sri Sarada Devi and Swami Vivekananda at Triveni Sangam on the occasion of Magh Mela from 23 January to 24 February. About 16,000 patients were treated at the medical camp and nearly 1,00,000 people witnessed the exhibition.

Ramakrishna Mission Vidyalaya, Coimbatore, organized the concluding function of its platinum jubilee celebrations from 1 to 8 February, comprising public meetings, an educational exhibition, publication of a souvenir, release of some books and CDs, an inter-school cultural competition, and distribution of educational kits and uniforms.

Srimat Swami Gitanandaji Maharaj, Vice President, Ramakrishna Math and Ramakrishna Mission, inaugurated the newly built extension to the monks' quarters at **Ramakrishna Math, Bankura**, on 9 February.

Ramakrishna Mission Students' Home, Chennai, organized the concluding ceremony of its centenary celebrations from 11 to 13 February. Swami Smarananandaji, General Secretary, Ramakrishna Math and Ramakrishna Mission, inaugurated the ceremony and released a souvenir. The functions included public meetings, cultural programmes, and the release of a CD and a special postal cover, among other things. Thousands of devotees and 166 monastics attended the functions.

On 13 February Swami Atmasthanandaji inaugurated the base camp building for the mobile dispensary run by **Ramakrishna Mission, Rajahmundry**, at Jagarampalli village.

The National Assessment and Accreditation Council (NAAC), an autonomous body under the University Grants Commission (UGC), has awarded A+ (90% to 95%) grade to **Ramakrishna Mission Vidyamandira (Saradapitha)** college. Vidyamandira is the first and so far the only college under Calcutta Univer-

sity to have obtained the A+ grade. It is also one of only two West Bengal colleges to secure the grade among 28 countrywide. With its actual score of 93.25%, Vidyamandira stands first in the whole of eastern and southern India, and fifth among 2396 colleges in the entire country accredited by NAAC so far.

Foreign News

Srimat Swami Gahananandaji Maharaj, Vice President, Ramakrishna Math and Ramakrishna Mission, dedicated the newly built Ramakrishna temple, which has a marble image of Sri Ramakrishna, at **Ramakrishna Math, Dhaka**, on 24 February (Swami Adbhutananda's birthday). Various public meetings held on this occasion were addressed, among others, by Swami Gahananandaji, Swami Atmasthanandaji, Swami Smarananandaji, Mayor of Dhaka Janab Sadeq Hossain, Bangladesh Minister of State for Water Resources Sri Gautam Chakraborty, Bangladesh Minister of State for Home affairs Janab Lutfuzzaman Babar and Bangladesh Minister of State for Religious Affairs Janab Musarref Hossain Sahjahan. A youth convention, a women's convention, and various cultural programmes formed a part of the 4-day function from 23 to 26 February. Nearly 25,000 devotees and about 110 monastics attended the function.

Relief and Rehabilitation (March 2005)

The number of mechanized boats and fishing nets provided by **Ramakrishna Math, Chennai**, in 4 districts of Tamil Nadu as part of its tsunami rehabilitation project rose to 55 and 54 respectively. The centre also distributed 13,500 shirts at 8 different places in Kanyakumari district. Till date, a sum of Rs 87.75 lakh has been spent on rehabilitation



New boats setting out to sea

work and 262 families have been benefited.

Ramakrishna Mission, Port Blair, distributed 15 kg mustard oil, 800 kg flour, 400 kg chira, 100 kg noodles, 12 kg baby food, 60 kg biscuits, 705 kg milk powder, 300 kg sugar, 25 kg tea, 12 kg pickles, 647 items of clothing, 138 blankets and bed sheets, 15 mosquito nets, 8 lanterns, 1 stove, 150 utensils, 100 cotton rolls, 1500 bandages, 100 packets of oral rehydration salts and a large quantity of medicines in and around the tsunami-hit city. It also provided 988 textbook sets, 6060 notebooks, 1103 school bags and other stationery items to 1202 students.

Efforts are being made by the Port Blair centre to adopt some children orphaned by the disaster. They would be accommodated in the centre's hostels. *Major repair work of the existing orphanage is already under way. The work needs donations made specifically for this purpose.*

Through its 2 tsunami relief camps at Veeranagar (Trincomalee) and Angulana (Moratuwa), **Ramakrishna Mission, Colombo**, distributed 1510 kg rice, 45 kg dal, 82 l cooking oil, 178 l coconut oil, 300 kg potatoes, 350 kg onions, 82 kg sugar, 165 kg spices, 60 kg tea, 53 kg milk powder, 30 biscuit packets, 164 soap bars and 616 plastic containers among 278 families.

Correction

In Dr C S Shah's article 'Implications of the First Three Meetings between Sri Ramakrishna and M' (January 2005, 82-8), the discussion mentioned under 'Third Meeting' (86-7) actually took place during M's second visit to Sri Ramakrishna. The oversight is regretted.